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# THE ENGLISH UTOPIA

# THE ENGLISH UTOPIA

By  
A. L. MORTON

"The land where the sun shines on both sides of  
the hedge."

*West Country Proverb.*

1952  
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TO  
VIVIEN

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS book is a story of two islands—the Island of Utopia and the Island of Britain. These islands have parallel histories which help to explain each other, and that is what I have tried to make them do. For Utopia is really the island which people thought or hoped or sometimes feared that the Britain of their day might presently become, and their thoughts were affected not only by the books they had read and the ideas with which they were familiar, but by what was going on in the real world about them, by the class they belonged to and by the part that class was playing and wanted to play in relation to other classes.

I have called it the *English*, and not the *British*, Utopia merely because the Utopias that have come my way have in fact been English and not Scottish, Irish or Welsh. Swift is only a partial exception to this generalisation. And I have been happy to confine myself to the Utopia of this one country because our literature is peculiarly rich in such books. This, I think, is mainly because of the very early development of bourgeois society here, and the classic form which that development took, so that English political thinkers had a peculiar pride in our history and felt a special duty to the world. This English pride sometimes takes the form of an odious smugness, and we shall discover that smugness is one of the vices which Utopia was least successful in eliminating, but sometimes it is large and generous, the desire of a man who is on to a good thing to share it with his neighbours. So here, one of the main motives of the makers of utopias is the desire to present their conceptions of democracy, of social living, of a true commonwealth, in the most popular, most acceptable way. I have “delivered my conception in a fiction, as a more mannerly way,” wrote Samuel Hartlib of his *Macaria*.

A second reason for the richness of the English Utopia is the simple one that England is an island. For it is always easier to imagine anything in proportion as it resembles what we are or know, and it is as an island that we always think of Utopia. The fact that an island is self-contained, finite, and may be remote, gives it just the qualities we require to set our imagination to work. True we shall find utopias underground, under the sea, surrounded by mountains in the heart of Africa or Asia, even on another planet or perhaps remote in time rather than space,

nevertheless the vast majority of utopias are still to be found on islands.

The English Utopia is so vast a field that I have not often been tempted to stray beyond it. But here and there I have done so, when this seemed necessary in the interests of perspective. I could not, for example, discuss Morris properly without saying something of Bellamy, nor could the French Utopian Socialists be altogether ignored.

Similarly, I have not felt myself too strictly bound by my definition of Utopia as an imaginary country described in a work of fiction with the object of criticising existing society. Some such definition was necessary to keep my book within reasonable bounds, and it excludes from consideration both attempts to found Utopian communities and works in which the element of fiction is absent. Yet something had to be said of Godwin, Owen and Winstanley, and in some of the books I discuss the element of social criticism has been reduced to very small proportions. Samuel Butler once defined definition as "the enclosing of a wilderness of ideas within a wall of words," and it would be a poor thing if I could not now and again turn my back on my wilderness to take a look over the wall at other men's gardens. All the same, a discussion of such figures as Winstanley and Owen at a length at all proportionate to their importance would have turned this book into something quite different from either the thing I planned or the thing it has grown into. So I have contented myself with, in the one case, a bare reference, and, in the other, an outline cut down to the minimum, though I am fully aware that this course will satisfy nobody.

Perhaps a note on the word Utopia might be helpful. It comes from two Greek words meaning "No place" and was adopted by Sir Thomas More as the name of his ideal commonwealth. From this it has been extended to cover all imaginary countries as well as books written about them. Here I use *Utopia* when I refer to the book by More, *Utopia* when I am referring to an imaginary country, and *utopia* when I am referring to a book about such a country. The distinction between the second and third uses is convenient, but not always easy to draw in practice, and anyone who took the trouble to look for them would probably find inconsistencies on this matter in the following pages.

CLARE.

March, 1952,

A. L. MORTON,

## CHAPTER I

### POOR MAN'S HEAVEN

O see ye not yon narrow road,  
So thick beset wi' thorns and briers?  
That is the Path of Righteousness,  
Though after it but few inquire.

And see ye not yon braid, braid road,  
That lies across the lily leven?  
That is the Path of Wickedness,  
Though some call it the Road to Heaven.

And see ye not yon bonny road  
That winds about the fernie brae?  
That is the Road to fair Elfland,  
Where thou and I this night maun gae.

Old Ballad: *Thomas the Rhymer*.

#### 1. *The Land of Cokayne*

IN the beginning Utopia is an image of desire. Later it grows more complex and various, and may become an elaborate means of expressing social criticism and satire, but it will always be based on something that somebody actually wants. The history of Utopia, therefore, will reflect the conditions of life and the social aspirations of classes and individuals at different times. The specific character of the land is reported varyingly according to the taste of the individual writer, but behind these variations is a continued modification that follows the normal course of historical development: the English Utopia is, as it were, a mirror image, more or less distorted, of the historical England. Poets, prophets and philosophers have made it a vehicle for delight and instruction, but before the poets, the prophets and the philosophers there were the common people, with their wrongs and their pleasures, their memories and their hopes. It is just, therefore, that the first chapter of this book should be given to the Utopia of the folk. It is the first in time, the most universally current and the most enduring, and it gives us a standard of values against which all its successors can be judged.

The Utopia of the folk has many names and disguises. It is the English Cokayne and the French Coquaigne. It is Pomona and Hy Brasil, Venusberg and the Country of the Young. It is Lubberland

and Schlaraffenland, Poor Man's Heaven and the Rock Candy Mountains. Brueghel, who of all the world's great artists comes nearest to the common mind, has even painted it in a picture that has many of the most characteristic features: the roof of cakes, the roast pig running round with a knife in its side, the mountain of dumpling and the citizens who lie at their ease waiting for all good things to drop into their mouths. The gingerbread house which Hansel and Gretel find in the enchanted wood belongs to the same country, and so, at the other end of the scale, does Rabelais' Abbaye de Thélème, whose motto is "Do what you will." It reaches back into myth, it colours romance, there is hardly a corner of Europe in which it does not appear. It would be idle, therefore, to attempt to look for its origins in any single place or period, much less in any one poem or story. Instead, I propose to discuss one version, the early Fourteenth Century English poem *The Land of Cokaygne*, and to work backward and forward from that point, finding parallels in myth and romance and tracing the development of the Cokaygne theme towards our own time.

This treatment is all the more suitable because this folk Utopia has preserved through the ages a remarkably constant character and all its main features are to be found at their clearest in *The Land of Cokaygne*. It is a poem of nearly two hundred lines which describes an earthly and earthy paradise, an island of magical abundance, of eternal youth and eternal summer, of joy, fellowship and peace.

Literary textbooks, when they mention this poem at all, treat it either as an anti-clerical satire or as a pleasant joke at the expense of those who want everything for nothing. Anti-clerical it certainly is, and no doubt it does intend to ridicule monastic gluttony and evil-living. Perhaps it may even be that the writer set out to use a familiar theme as a means of attacking current abuses. But if so, the theme quickly got out of hand, and the satire was swallowed up in the Utopia. After opening with a comparison between Cokaygne and Paradise very much to the advantage of the former:

"Though Paradis be miri and bright,  
Cokaygne is of fairir sight.  
What is ther in Paradis  
Bot grasse and flure and grene ris? . . .

Ther nis halle, bure, no benche,  
Bot watir, manis thurst to quenche,"<sup>1</sup>

whereas in Cokaygne,

"Watir servith ther to no thing  
Bot to sight and to waiissing"<sup>2</sup>

the poet is quickly carried away with the delights to be found. Only towards the end does he appear to remember his ostensible subject, in an amusing passage describing monastic sports, and even here one feels that condemnation is considerably tempered with something like admiration.

The first point of interest is the situation of the island:

"Fur in see bi west of Spayngne  
Is a lond ihote Cokaygne."<sup>3</sup>

This westward placing clearly connects Cokaygne with the earthly paradise of Celtic mythology. Throughout the Middle Ages the existence of such a paradise was firmly believed in, but the church always placed its paradise in the East and strongly opposed the belief in a western paradise as a heathen superstition. In spite of this ecclesiastical opposition the belief persisted, kept alive by the frequent washing ashore on the Atlantic coasts of foreign wood, nuts and even, in a few cases, of canoes of Indian or Esquimau construction, driven to sea by unfavourable weather. So strong were these beliefs that in the form of St. Branden's Isle the western paradise had to be christianised and adopted by the Church itself, and a number of expeditions were sent out from Ireland and elsewhere in search of the Isle. Nevertheless, the fact that Cokaygne is a *western* island is an indication that the Cokaygne theme is of popular and pre-christian character, and the western placing may in itself be taken as one of the specifically anti-clerical features.

Further, Cokaygne has many of the characteristics of the pagan Island of Apples, or Pomona, where, as Baring-Gould says—

"all is plenty and the golden age ever lasts. Cows give their milk in such abundance that they fill large ponds in milking.

<sup>1</sup> Though Paradise is merry and bright, Cokaygne is yet more beautiful. What is there in Paradise but grass and flowers and green boughs? . . . There is neither hall nor chamber nor bench, and nothing but water to quench man's thirst.

<sup>2</sup> Water serves there for no purpose except sight and washing.

<sup>3</sup> Far in the sea, to the West of Spain, is a land called Cokaygne.



There, too, is a palace all of glass, floating in the air and receiving within its transparent walls the souls of the blessed."

Or, to quote from an Irish description:

"milk flows from some of the rivulets, others gush with wine; undoubtedly there are also streams of whisky and porter."

These descriptions may be compared not only with the abundance to be found in Cokaygne, but also with the pillars that—

"Beth i-turned of cristale,  
With har bas and capitale  
Of grene jasper and rede corale,"<sup>1</sup>

with the richness of precious stones and the windows of glass which turn into crystal whenever they are needed. The palace or hill of glass, is, indeed, a regular feature of the earthly paradise in all mythologies.

Above all else, however, Cokaygne is the land where everything comes true. It is the Utopia of the hard-driven serf, the man for whom things are too difficult, for whom the getting of a bare living is a constant struggle. If this aspect predominates to the exclusion, with one exception to which I shall come presently, of any clear sense of the class struggle, this is not unnatural considering the circumstances of the time. Of course there was a class struggle in the Middle Ages. There was oppression and exploitation, of an extremely harsh and naked character. There was a glaring contrast between the lives of the serfs and the lives of the gentry and rich clergy, and it is quite possible that part of the object of this poem was to point the contrast between serf and monk. Nevertheless we have also to remember the general poverty of the Middle Ages, the result of an extremely poor technique of production, which made available only a relatively small surplus after the bare needs had been provided for the working population.

Consequently, men were much more directly aware than they are today of the tyranny of necessity, the essential hardness in the nature of things. Man was so far from being the master of his environment that he was always prone to feel that it was *his* master. He depended on the weather not only because bad weather is unpleasant, but because a bad season might mean absolute

<sup>1</sup> The pillars are fashioned of crystal, with their bases and capitals of green jasper and red coral.

famine. And, under the very best conditions, long hours and a bare living were still a necessity from which he could see no possible way of escape. Even the overthrow of his masters, supposing that to have been possible, would not have released the serf from this compulsion to any appreciable extent. It was probably an advance that by the Fourteenth Century men were becoming conscious of this burden. By this time the period of migration and invasions, with its consequent breaking of society into small, self-contained units, was well over. Co-operation and the division of labour were extending to wider areas, and, with the growth of trade, towns were also growing and were winning a measure of local self-government. There was a slow but in the aggregate quite considerable advance in technique, and, in England at any rate, serfdom was in decline and its harsher features were becoming modified. As a result, what had formerly been so universally endured without question or hope was at last beginning to be felt as a burden: the serf was becoming aware of his servitude and the Fourteenth Century was the great period of peasant insurrection.

Out of this situation, this *beginning* of hope, springs *The Land of Cockayne*. Without the hope it could scarcely have arisen at all. If the hope had been stronger or better grounded it would not have taken shape as a fantasy, a grotesque dream of a society wished for but not seen as an actual possibility. It is this fantastic quality which has led to it being regarded as a clumsy joke, and, indeed, it is easy enough to ridicule the vision of the great abbey:

"Fleuren cakes beth the schingles alle,  
Of cherche, cloister, boure, and halle.  
The pinnes beth fat podinges,  
Rich met to princez and to kinges,"<sup>1</sup>

or the

"rivers gret and fine  
Of oile, melk, honi, and wine,"<sup>2</sup>

the

"gees irostid on the spitte  
Fleez to that abbai, God hit wot,  
And gredith, 'Gees al hote, al hot!'"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All the shingles of the church, the cloister, the chamber and hall are made of flour cakes. The pinnacles are of fat puddings, grand food for princes and kings.

<sup>2</sup> Great and splendid rivers of oil, milk, honey and wine.

<sup>3</sup> Roasted geese on spits, by God's truth, fly to that abbey crying out, "Geese all hot, all hot."

and

“The leverokes that beth cuth,  
Lightith adun to manis muth,  
Idight in stu ful swithe wel,  
Pudrid with gilofre and canel.”<sup>1</sup>

But is this, apart from the simplicity of its language, any more laughable than Malory's account of the first appearance of the Grail:

“Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, and there was none might see it, nor who bare it. And there was all the hall fulfilled with good odours, and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in the world.”

In fact, in this side of Cokaygne we can see the fusion of the pre-christian nature cults of abundance with the very practical needs and desires of the people, into a picture of a land whose happiness is none the less material and earthy for the grotesque form in which it is presented.

An especially interesting aspect of this abundance is the spice tree:

“The rote is gingevir and galingale  
The siouns beth al sedwale  
Trie maces beth the flure,  
The rind, canel of swet odor,  
The frute, gilofre of gode smakke.”<sup>2</sup>

This is not merely a pretty fancy. Spices were specially prized in the Middle Ages and even later because of the monotonous and unpalatable diet, especially in the winter. Owing to the difficulties of trade with the East, they fetched prices which put them out of the reach of all but the rich, so that a plentiful supply of spices growing ready to hand would be a most desirable object to find in the Land of Cokaygne.

This abundance of spices also, together with the four wells of “triacle and halwei, of baum and ek picment”,<sup>3</sup> connect Cokaygne

<sup>1</sup> Tasty larks fly down into men's mouths dressed in most excellent stew and sprinkled with gillyflower and cinnamon.

<sup>2</sup> The root is ginger and sweet cyperus, the shoots are valerian, the flowers choice nutmegs, the bark odorous cinnamon and the fruit sweet scented gillyflower.

<sup>3</sup> Triacle is medicine, halwei is healing water and picment is a kind of wine.

with yet another mythological feature, the Well of Youth or of Life, which flows through so many Earthly Paradises, eastern as well as western, and of which Sir John Mandeville writes:

"And under that citie is an hyll that men call Polombe [Colombo] and thereof taketh the citie his name. And so at the fote of the same hill is a right faire and clere well, that hath a full good and sweete savoure, and it smelleth of all manner of sortes of spyce, and also at eche houre of the daye it changeth his savour diversely, and who drinketh on the daye of that well, he is made hole of all manner sickness that he hath. I have sometime dronke of that well, and methinketh yet that I fare the better; some call it the well of youth, for they that drinke thereof seme to be yong alway, and live without great sicknesse, and they say this well cometh from Paradise terrestre, for it is so vertuous, and in this land groweth ginger, and thither come many good merchaunts for spyces."

Not only is Cokaygne a land of plenty, it is a land where this plenty can be enjoyed without effort, and it is perhaps this characteristic more than any other which has infuriated the moralist and which was responsible for the disrepute into which Cokaygne presently fell. Yet it is clear that in a world where endless and almost unrewarded labour was the lot of the overwhelming majority, a Utopia which did not promise rest and idleness would be sadly imperfect. Idleness is, indeed, rather less stressed in *The Land of Cokaygne* than in some other versions, that of Brueghel, for example, and the modern *Rock Candy Mountain*. While, indeed, the larks alight ready dressed in the mouth, what is really insisted upon is that meat and drink can be had "without care, how, and swink", that is, without the grinding and excessive labour that filled the whole life of the medieval serf.

And there is very much more in Cokaygne than gluttony and idleness. What is specially insisted on and most morally impressive is that it is a land of peace, happiness and social justice:

"Al is dai, nis ther no nighte,  
 Ther nis baret nother strif,  
 Nis ther no deth, ac ever lif;  
 Ther nis lac of met no cloth,  
 Ther nis man no womman wroth. . . .

Al is commune to yung and old,  
To stoute and sterne, mek and bold."<sup>1</sup>

It is this social feeling, this sense of fellowship, which lifts Cokaygne out of the realm of the grotesque, or, rather, makes it one of those rare yet characteristic popular testaments in which the grotesque and the sublime unite to give a true and living picture of the mind of the common man. One is conscious here, as elsewhere, that the class feeling that is never *directly* voiced lies only just below the surface.

This feeling is strengthened by the curious and ironical closing lines:

"Whose wyl com that lond to,  
Ful gret penance he mot do:  
Seven yere in swin-is dritte  
He mote wade, wol ye i-witte,  
Al anon up to the chynne  
So he schal the londe winne.  
Lordinges gode and hende  
Mot ye never of world wend  
Fort ye stond to yure cheance,  
And fulfil that penance,  
That ye mote that lond ise  
And never more turne a-ghe.  
Pray ye God, so mote it be  
Amen, per seinte charite."<sup>2</sup>

The meaning is clear enough: Cokaygne is, like the Kingdom of Heaven, harder for a rich man to enter than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Only by seven years spent up to the chin in swine's dirt—only, that is, by living the life of the most wretched and exploited serf, can a man find his way thither. And the specific address to the "Lordinges gode and hende," though such dedications were, of course, common form, gives the point additional emphasis.

<sup>1</sup> All is day, there is no night there, there is neither quarrelling nor strife, there is no death, but eternal life; there is no lack of food and clothes, and neither man nor woman is angry. . . . All is common to young and old, to strong and stern, to meek and bold.

<sup>2</sup> The man who wishes to come to that land must do very great penance. He must wade for seven years, no doubt about it, right up to the chin in swine's dirt to win his way there. My good, kind Lords, you will never go from the world unless you are prepared to endure and to fulfil that penance, so that you may see that land and never more return. Pray to God that it may be so, by holy charity.

This linking of social justice with abundance in Cokaygne suggests an interesting parallel with the ancient tradition of classical stoicism, the most radical philosophy of the Greek and Roman world. Benjamin Farrington, in his essay on Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian of the first century B.C., cites the passage in his *Universal History* which contains an account of the Stoic Utopia, "The Islands of the Sun", a Utopia which certainly influenced Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1623) and most probably More's *Utopia*.

Farrington points out that the sun "who dispenses his light and warmth equally upon all", was closely connected in classical thought with the conception of justice:

"There is abundant evidence that in many circles, where the religion of the stars had blended with aspirations after a juster society, the sun was looked upon in a special sense as the dispenser of justice, the guarantor of fair-play, the redresser of grievances, the one who held the balance straight. . . . In the third century B.C., the sun had become the centre of the millennial aspirations of the dispossessed among mankind. It was believed that at recurrent periods the sun-king would descend from heaven to earth to re-establish justice and make all men participators in a happiness without alloy."

Such beliefs were especially encouraged by the Stoics. In the account of their Islands of the Sun given by Diodorus, apparently in the belief that he was describing a real country, we can recognise a number of the features we have already found to be characteristic of Cokaygne. There is the magical abundance and perfect climate:

"The air of their land is perfectly tempered, for they live on the equinoctial line and are troubled neither by heat nor cold. Their fruits are in season all the year. . . . Their life is passed in the meadows, the land supplying abundant sustenance; for by reason of the excellence of the soil and the temperate air crops spring up of themselves beyond their needs."

The sea round the islands is sweet to the taste, thus recalling the sweet springs of Cokaygne, and

"The water of their hot springs, which is sweet and wholesome, keeps its heat and never grows cold, unless cold water or wine is added."

The element of magical healing is present, too, in the form of an animal whose blood

“has a wonderful property. It immediately glues together a cut in any living body, and a hand or other part that has been cut off can be fastened on again by it while the cut is fresh.”

All this is combined with an unbreakable social solidarity:

“Since there is no jealousy among them there is no civil strife, and they keep their love of unity and concord throughout life.”

What I am suggesting is not, of course, any direct or conscious borrowing by the medieval folk-poets, but the persistence of a tradition, and, perhaps, of a common stock of legend upon which they and the Stoics all ultimately drew.

In the same stream of thought were the political theories widely held in the earlier Middle Ages, even by those in authority, that a right society was one with goods held in common and without classes or oppressive state apparatus. Government and private property was considered to have been the inevitable result of the Fall and of man's sinful state. Such ideas were related to those about a Golden Age and perhaps embody memories of primitive communism. After the thirteenth century, and with the growing influence of Aquinas the official theorists began to argue that private property and class divisions were a natural feature of human society. Nevertheless, the old ideas about communism being the true form of society persisted, and, among the masses, took a form very different from those official theories which had placed upon the sinfulness of man the blame for his inability to realise the ideal. We can see something of this in the preaching of John Ball and in the social character of the Land of Cokaygne.

There is a further development in the Cokaygne theme, not found in this particular version, though possibly hinted at in its closing lines, which is of peculiar sociological interest. This feature, pointed out by R. J. E. Tiddy in *The Mummers' Play*, is the regular juxtaposition of the abundance theme with the theme of the reversal of the normal, of topsy-turveydom, as he calls it. This topsy-turveydom is another familiar topic of medieval popular art and literature, which delighted in such situations as the hawk being pursued by the heron, the sack dragging the ass to the mill or the fish hooking the fisherman. Often, too, it takes the form of

rough verbal nonsense. In the Western-sub-Edge Mummers' Play, for example, Beelzebub makes a long speech of this kind:

"I went up a straight crooked lane. I met a bark and he dogged at me. I went to the stick and cut a hedge. . . . I went of the morroe about nine days after, picks up this jeid (dead) dog, romes my arm down his throat, turned him inside outwards, sent him down Buckle Street barking ninety yards long, and I followed after him."

He is followed immediately by Jack Finney who proceeds:

"Now my lads we come to the land of plenty, rost stones, plum puddings, houses thatched with pancakes, and little pigs running about with knives and forks stuck in their backs crying 'Who'll eat me?'"

Similarly in the Ampleford Sword Dance:

"I've travelled all the way from Itti Titti, where there's neither town nor city, wooden chimes, leather bells, black puddings for bell ropes, little pigs running up and down the streets, knives and forks stuck in their backsides crying 'God save the King.'"

Once again, the essentially significant point has to be looked for beneath the jest, and we have a clue that leads straight to the rebellious core of the popular thought of the time. Two strands, formally opposed but in practice complementary, run through the revolutionary thought of the Middle Ages. One is that of equality: "When Adam delved and Eve span, who then was the gentleman?" The other is that of upheaval and reversal, of the world turned upside down: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats and hath exalted the humble and meek." It is the second of these strands which historically has naturalised itself in the Land of Cokaygne.

The connection here shows itself in the various popular festivals of which the Feast of Fools may be taken as the type. Strictly, the Feast of Fools was a religious affair in which the subdeacons and others in minor orders in certain churches took control of the ceremonies for a day, while the usual authorities were relegated to a subordinate position. There can be no doubt, however, that this was also a time of more general licence and merry-making, and that there were other similar festivals of a more exclusively secular nature like the crowning of the Lord of



Misrule, referred to by Philip Stubbes in his *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583). Usually the Feast of Fools began on the eve of the Feast of the Circumcision (New Year's Day—in itself a significant detail, since the New Year has always been a time when the idea of making a change or a new start is powerful).<sup>1</sup> The signal was the reaching at evensong of the verse from the Magnificat already quoted—He hath put down the mighty. At this point the choir and the minor orders would take the bit between their teeth. The verse, always a slogan of revolt, was repeated over and over again. A master of ceremonies, known by varying titles such as the King of Fools, the Lord of Misrule or the Boy Bishop, was elected. Mass was celebrated with all sorts of ludicrous additions: an ass would be led into the church with a rider facing its tail, and braying take the place of the responses at the most solemn parts: censuring was parodied with black puddings: the clergy turned their garments inside out, changed garments with women or adopted animal disguises: soon the excitement and licence would spread beyond the church throughout the town or city.

The higher ecclesiastical authorities tried for centuries without great success to suppress or even tone down these proceedings. Professor E. K. Chambers quotes a letter from the Theological Faculty of the University of Paris which both expresses the official view and gives a lively picture of what happened:

“Priests and clerks may be seen wearing masks and monstrous visages at the hours of office. They dance in the choir, dressed as women, pandars or minstrels. They sing wanton songs. They eat black puddings at the horn of the altar while the celebrant is saying mass. They play at dice there. They cense with stinking smoke from the soles of old shoes. They run and leap through the church without shame. Finally they drive about the town and its theatres in shabby traps and carts; and rouse the laughter of their fellows and the bystanders in infamous performances, with indecent gestures and verses scurrilous and unchaste.”

Professor Chambers summarises the general character of the Festival by saying:

“The ruling idea of the feast is the inversion of status, and the performance, invariably burlesque, by the inferior clergy of

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the official New Year at this time—March 25th—brings us close to another similar Festival, that of All Fools' Day.

functions properly belonging to their betters. . . . Now I would point out that this inversion of status so characteristic of the Feast of Fools is equally characteristic of folk festivals. What is Dr. Frazer's mock king but one of the meanest of the people chosen out to represent the real king as the priest victim of a divine sacrifice, and surrounded, for the period of the feast, in a naïve attempt to outwit heaven, with all the paraphernalia of kingship?"

When we remember that these folk-rites were planned to ensure favourable weather and an abundance of food, their connection with the Cokaygne theme is easily explained. They link similarly with the Roman Kalends and Saturnalia,<sup>1</sup> themselves relics of the pre-classical religious practices of the country people, in which there was in the same way a time of general licence, and whose most striking feature was the temporary equality of slaves with their masters. Once more, rites and customs possibly prehistoric survive because they still correspond to existing realities, and supply the mould in which the revolutionary feeling of a later age expresses itself.

It may be argued that in these fantasies, Cokaygne dreams and symbolic festivals, this revolutionary feeling was canalised, diverted and rendered harmless. It would be truer to say that this was a period in which revolution was not objectively possible though popular riots were, of course frequent, and that they were the means of keeping alive hopes and aspirations that might otherwise have died away, and which at a later date would prove of immense value. The same may be said about the closely related witch cult. Here, also, we have a surviving pre-Christian religion, driven underground and forced to exist secretly, yet claiming countless adherents. The cult appears to have been highly organised and at times to have served as a focus for movements of political revolt, though, in the nature of things, the direct evidence here must be extremely meagre. What is certain is that periodical meetings or Sabbats were held, at which the main features were an elaborate and lavish, if rude, feast and ceremonies that were a deliberate reversal of the normal, as, for example, in the dances performed anti-clockwise and in the inverted mimicry of Christian ritual. It should be remembered,

<sup>1</sup> Saturn was the ancient ruler of the Gods, whose reign was a time of peace and universal abundance before the development of classes,

also, that dancing of any kind was discouraged by the priests as something devilish and pagan, and but for the wide diffusion of the witch cult might have been stamped out altogether. It is by no means impossible that the account of Cokaygne may be in part at any rate a veiled description of the Sabbat, which was probably not, in the earlier times at least, the horrific and diabolical affair which it was represented as being by ecclesiastical writers. Such speculations lead us far into the land of conjecture, however. We must remember that nothing survives to give us the point of view of the witches except a few chance answers in cross-examination which have found their way into the accounts of their trials.

## 2. *The History of Cokaygne*

Summing up the account given in the last section, we can say that the Land of Cokaygne embodies the profoundest feelings of the masses, expresses them in an extremely concrete and earthy fashion, and is related to the main theme of popular mythology on the one hand and the main stream of popular revolt on the other. It is really quite central, and could hardly have failed to receive much more attention than has been given to it, if it had not from the start been constantly ridiculed or ignored by the learned and respectable. The literary references to it are few and indirect, and always it is treated as something too childish or too disgusting to be worthy of serious attention. Even Shakespeare, whose broad human understanding brings him so close to the mind of the people, and who puts into the mouth of Gonzalo (*Tempest*, Act II, Scene 1) what appears to be a sympathetic if rather classicised account of Cokaygne, hardly treats it as a serious matter and allows Gonzalo to be laughed out of countenance for a pedlar of old wives' tales. Ben Johnson in *Bartholomew Fair* is openly contemptuous: and we should note that Cokaygne has now become Lubberland—the country of idle good-for-nothings—an attitude that may be connected with the new respect for diligence and the accumulation of wealth that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie. Dame Purecraft, in the authentic accents of Mr. Bumble, rebukes Littlewit for wanting pork, to which he replies:

“Good Mother, how shall we find a pig if we don't look about for't? Will it run off o' the spit into our mouths, think you? as in Lubberland and cry *we we?*”

Two other examples of this contemptuous attitude may be given from the utopian writers of the seventeenth century. The first is from *Mundus Alter et Idem*, written by Bishop Hall, probably about 1600, and published in 1607. Though in Latin, it was a popular work which had more than one imitator and which was translated by John Heeley in 1608. It is from this translation that I shall quote. The book itself is of interest as being the first of the negative or satirical utopias, books in which the social criticism takes the form of describing in imaginary countries those vices and follies the author would have us avoid. It describes a voyage to Terra Australia and the discovery there of Crapulia, the land of excess. It is divided into five provinces: Pamphagoia, or Gluttons' Land, Yvronia, or Drunkards' Land, Viraginia, where women rule, Moronia, or Fools' Land—said to be the largest, the least cultivated and the most populous of all—and Lavernia, the Land of Rogues, most of whose inhabitants find a dishonest living at the expense of their neighbours the Moronians. Nearby is situated Terra Sancta, marked on the accompanying map as "non adhuc satis cognita."

In the main no doubt, Bishop Hall intended to satirise the failings of his age, but there are also clear indications that a part of his intention was to portray a sort of anti-Cokaygne, to express the disgust felt by the cultivated mind of the comfortable churchman at the grossness of popular delusions. This is evident in the chapters describing Pamphagoia, whose god is the great Omasius Gorgut or Gorbelly. Here:

"There are certaine creatures grown out of the earth in the shape of Lambes, which, being fast joyned unto the stalke they grow upon do notwithstanding eat up all the grasse about them . . . the fishes . . . are naturally so ravenous and greedy that you can no sooner cast out your angle-hook among them but immediately . . . you shall have hundreds about the line, some hanging on the hooke, and some on the string besides it, such is their pleasure to goe to the pot, such their delight to march in pompe from the dresser."

There follows a series of revolting descriptions of the manners of the people, and the condition to which they are brought by over-indulgence. So in Idleberg, which is but another name for Lubberland,

"The richest sort have attendants: one to open the master's eyes gently when he awaketh: one to fanne a coole ayre whilest he eateth, a third to put in his viands when he gapeth, a fourth to girdle his belly as it riseth and falleth, the master onley exerciseth but eating, digesting and laying out."

And there is a real touch of horror in the account of the city of Marchpane, which:

"hath but very few inhabitants of any years that have any teeth left: but all, from 18 to the grave, are the naturale heirs of stinking breaths."

*Mundus Alter et Idem* is a vigorous and entertaining work which ranks quite high in the peculiarly English *genre* of the satirical utopia. Samuel Gott's *Nova Solyma*, on the other hand, is perhaps the most dreary and repellent utopia ever written.<sup>1</sup> Yet it does contain one passage that is really striking, the fable of Philomela. It describes a palace of pleasure, where guests are invited to a perpetual banquet, in the midst of which they are suddenly precipitated into a sewer:

"There the remains of the banquets and the vomit of overcharged stomachs and other filthy excrements lay rotting, and with them the skeletons of those who by violence or disease had come to an untimely end or by hunger and cold had been the victims of the cruellest usage. There was a horrid noise, too, of rattling chains, and the roar of wild beasts seizing their prey, and at your feet was a great, steep precipice, and below that a huge, impassable river, into which many of the wretched captives willingly drowned themselves, rather than suffer the prolonged torture of so horrible a fate, and the lacerations of the wild beasts."

So, for the middle-class Puritan, ends the Earthly Paradise, in disgust, in unspeakable misery and in death.

This kind of moral reprobation can be seen, too, at a much later date in Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863). He tells of the sad fate of the Doasyoulikes, who lived in the land of Readymade at the foot of the Happy-go-lucky Mountains:

"They sat under the flapdoodle-trees, and let the flapdoodle drop into their mouths; and under the vines, and squeezed the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter III, Section 2.

grapejuice down their throats; and, if any little pigs ran about ready roasted, crying, 'Come and eat me,' as was their fashion in that country, they waited till the pigs ran against their mouths, and then took a bite, and were content, just as so many oysters would have been."

For which shameful disregard of the Victorian Gospel of Work they are visited with a progressive series of catastrophes and with ultimate extinction.

The people themselves have never shared these opinions. Whatever their betters might say they have continued to cherish the dream of Cokaygne. In song, in story and in play, the theme persisted, breaking only rarely into printed literature and then only in broadsheets and chapbooks circulating among the half-literate. The frequent references in the folk plays have been mentioned already. Another appearance, for knowledge of which I am indebted to Jack Lindsay, is in a volume of *Songs of the Bards of the Tyne*, published in 1849 but containing poems written considerably earlier and sometimes employing themes obviously traditional. One poem has the following passage:

"Aw gat in to see Robin Hood,  
Had two or three quairts wi John Nipes, man;  
And Wesley, that yence preached sae good,  
Sat smokin' and praisin' the swipes, man:

"Legs of mutton here grows on each tree,  
Jack Nipes said, and wasn't mistaken—  
When rainin' there's such a bit spree,  
For there comes down great fat sides o' bacon."

Whether Wesley had reached Cokaygne because or in spite of the excellence of his preaching is by no means clear. Another poem from the same collection says:

"As aw cam doon, aw passed the meun,  
An' her greet burning mountains—  
Her turnpike roads aw found out seun,  
Strang beer runs there in fountains."

It is interesting to note that both these poems have as their subject the theme of the magical cure, especially since it is always in the part of the folk-plays dealing with the cure and the restoration to life of the dead hero that the Cokaygne passages occur.

Here once more we find the link between the Cokaygne of popular tradition and the mythological Fortunate Isles with their fountain or well of perpetual youth. The same connection can be seen in one of the very few modern literary Cokaygne references, W. B. Yeats' poem *The Happy Townland*. Here:

"Boughs have their fruit and blossom  
At all times of the year;  
Rivers are running over  
With red beer and brown beer."

And, while the inhabitants enjoy themselves by fighting, every night:

"All that are killed in battle  
Awaken to life again.  
It is lucky that their story  
Is not known among men,  
For O, the strong farmers  
That would let the spade lie,  
Their hearts would be like a cup  
That somebody had drunk dry."

Yeats, who commonly looked for subject-matter to his native mythology, naturally approaches Cokaygne indirectly through the Celtic Earthly Paradise. Far more direct and definitely working class in origin, and for both reasons more important for our purpose, are the numerous references in modern American folk songs and tales. The most complete Cokaygne pictures are in two songs, *The Big Rock Candy Mountains* and *Poor Man's Heaven*. Superficially similar, these songs contain most of the usual Cokaygne features: the abundance of food, the miraculous streams, the eternal summer and the delight of idleness. Thus:

"In the Big Rock Candy Mountains  
All the cops have wooden legs,  
And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth,  
And the hens lay soft boiled eggs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Brueghel's *Schlaraffenland* there is a boiled egg in a cup, running about ready opened, with a spoon sticking out of the top. Obviously the makers of this song knew nothing of Brueghel, but the persistence of all these minute details is an indication of a clear and continuous verbal tradition of which we have only accidental and disconnected evidence.

The farmers' trees are full of fruit  
And the barns are full of hay,  
Oh I'm bound to go, where there ain't no snow,  
Where the rain don't fall, where the wind don't blow."

There:

"The little streams of alcohol  
Come a-trickling down the rocks. . . .  
There's a lake of stew and of whisky too,"

and:

"There ain't no short-handled shovels,  
No axes, saws or picks,  
I'm bound to stay where they sleep all day,  
Where they hung the Turk that invented work,  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains."

Similarly:

"In Poor Man's Heaven we'll have our own way,  
There's nothing up there but good luck,  
There's strawberry pie  
That's twenty feet high  
And whipped cream they bring in a truck. . . .  
We'll eat all we please  
Off ham and egg trees,  
That grow by the lake full of beer."

The Cokaygne theme crops up in a variety of other forms and places. Among the Negroes, for example in one of the stories about John Henry, that mythological hero of so many legends in which the bounds of human possibility are miraculously enlarged. In this one he finds a tree made of honey and another of flitterjacks:

"Well, John Henry set there an' et honey an' flitterjacks, an' after while when he went to git up to go, button pop off'n his pants an' kill a rabbit mo' 'n hundred ya'ds on other side o' de tree. An' so up jumped brown baked pig wid sack o' biscuits on his back, an' John Henry et him too.

"So John Henry gits up to go through woods to camp for supper, 'cause he 'bout to be late an' he mighty hongry for his supper. John Henry sees lake down hill an' thinks he'll git him a drink o' water, 'cause he's thirsty, too, after eatin' honey an' flitterjacks an' brown roast pig an' biscuits, still he's hungry



yet. An' so he goes down to git drink water an' finds lake ain't nothin' but lake o' honey, an' out in middle dat lake ain't nothin' but tree full o' biscuits too."

Again, there is the story of *Jack's Hunting Trips*, a composite version made by Richard Chase from the narrations of a number of mountain story-tellers in Virginia. In the course of the tale, Jack (who is indeed our old friend Jack of the Beanstalk) goes hunting along a river of honey, shaded by fritter trees, and little pigs come out of the brush with a knife and fork stuck in there backs, squealing to be eaten.<sup>1</sup>

Here, I think, we can see something of the kind of way in which the Cokaygne theme crossed the Atlantic, and A. L. Lloyd, to whom I am heavily indebted for information about its American versions, has suggested that the immediate ancestor of *The Big Rock Candy Mountains* is a popular Norwegian song, with a very similar tune, which first appeared in print in 1853 and became a popular classic throughout Norway. In it the legendary character Ole Bull invites one and all to leave their miserable lives for the freedom of Oleana. Some of the verses of this song run roughly as follows:

"In Oleana, that's where I'd like to be, and not dragging the chains of slavery in Norway.

"In Oleana they give you land for nothing, and the grain just pops out of the ground—it's money for jam!

"The grain threshes itself in the granary, while I stretch at ease in my bunk.

"And Munich beer, as good as Yetteborg can brew, runs in the creeks for the poor man's delight.

"And brown roasted pigs leap about so prettily, asking politely if anyone would like ham."

To the Norwegian peasant and fisherman the Earthly Paradise lay in America, to which thousands were emigrating throughout the Nineteenth Century: when the emigrant arrived he quickly found that this Utopia had existed only in the imagination. In life

<sup>1</sup> Honey: another echo of the Middle Ages, when sugar was almost unknown and honey greatly prized as the one substance available for sweetening. Perhaps the same kind of conditions were found in outlying parts of the U.S.A. where the pioneers were largely self-supporting and imported sugar would also be a luxury.

it was something that had to be fought for or pushed away into a distant, fantastic, Never-never Land.<sup>1</sup>

It is startling to find the same thoughts and desires expressed in almost the same words in a new continent and after six centuries, in fourteenth century England and in the United States of the early twentieth, or, more probably in the late nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> the one feudal, decentralised and almost entirely agricultural, the other a highly organised, industrial country with an advanced technique and with capitalism already reaching the stage of monopoly. Nevertheless, the U.S.A. although the Frontier in the old sense had disappeared by the last decades of the nineteenth century, still contained vast areas incompletely opened up. Consequently there was a mass of migratory, unskilled labour, building railways and roads, digging canals and irrigation works, attached to no particular job but prepared to leave at short notice for any point in the Union where there were reports of good wages and plenty of work. And, at the same time, the battle with nature had not yet been won. While there was intense class exploitation, it was still often possible to feel, in the primitive hardness of the conditions of life, that the mass of the people were not only up against the rule of the rich but also against the inevitable oppression of natural forces. This is the common factor which may account for the reappearance in so many new forms of the Cokaygne theme.

Nevertheless, time does not stand still, and the theme reappears with significant modifications, which account not only for the differences between both *Poor Man's Heaven* and *The Big Rock Candy Mountains* and the medieval *Land of Cokaygne*, but between these two songs themselves. *The Big Rock Candy Mountains* is closer in feeling to the original. It is fantastic and passive, and, indeed, for all its surface gaiety, has an underlying weariness and cynicism born of a fuller realisation that Cokaygne under modern conditions is no more than a dream. It is a song of the bum, the more demoralised element among the migratory workers. It is a decadent Utopia, as any Utopia must be in our time which turns away from the class struggle.

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd also suggests that Oleana may have suggested to Ibsen the Utopia of Gyntiana, in Act IV of *Peer Gynt*. Ibsen is perhaps an even more unexpected person than Wesley to meet in the Land of Cokaygne!

<sup>2</sup> Like most folk songs and tales these are hard to date, but there seems to be a reference in *Poor Man's Heaven* to the Populist anti-trust and cheap money agitation that culminated in Bryan's election campaign of 1896.

*Poor Man's Heaven* is active and positive where *The Big Rock Candy Mountains* is passive and negative. It is Cokayne with some of the old fantastic elements, but with the addition to them of the class struggle, even if in a somewhat anarchist form. Thus, for example, whereas:

"In the Big Rock Candy Mountains  
The jails are made of tin,  
And you can walk right out again  
As soon as you are in,"

in *Poor Man's Heaven*:

"We'll take an iron rail  
And open the jail,  
And let all the poor men out quick."

And again, while in the first case:

"The brakemen have to tip their caps  
And the railroad bulls are blind,"

in the second:

"We'll ride in a train,  
And sleep in a pullman at night,  
And if someone should dare to ask for our fare  
We'll hold up and put out his light."

In *Poor Man's Heaven*, also, the conception of idleness takes a new and more revolutionary form with the addition of the idea of class reversal:

"And we will be fed  
With breakfast in bed,  
And served by a fat millionaire."

Most striking of all is the contrast of the concluding lines, where in place of the rather pathetic jauntiness of:

"I'll see you all this coming Fall,  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,"

we have:

"In Poor Man's Heaven we'll own our own homes  
And we won't have to sweat like a slave,  
But we will be proud to sing right out loud,  
The land of the free and the brave."

Whereas in the hand of the bum, the idea of Cokaygne loses even the implication of class revolt which it originally had, among the genuine migratory workers, the men who built up the I.W.W. with its unsurpassed record of fearless militancy, these implications, always present, are developed and enriched by their contact with modern socialism.

And, indeed, fantastic as its form may have been, Cokaygne does anticipate some of the most fundamental conceptions of modern socialism. Socialism, if it is to be anything but an academic fabrication of blueprints, must take its rise from the desires and hopes of the people. It is from this that it derives its life, its actuality and its assurance of final victory. The classless society is Cokaygne made practical by scientific knowledge. Socialism is in agreement with Cokaygne, above all, in the belief that abundance is possible without the burden of unending and soul-destroying toil: the naïve and pictorial expression in which this perfectly correct belief found expression in the Cokaygne literature was a result of the impossibility of finding any practical realisation in view of the low level of the technique of production in the Middle Ages. The conquest of nature was then only beginning, and so the final triumph of man over nature could only be expressed magically and symbolically. In this way *The Land of Cokaygne* is the beginning of a dialectical growth of the conception of Utopia, which has its culmination in the greatest and the most fully socialist work of this type, William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, a book which gathers up all the riches and experiences of the philosophical Utopias of the intervening period and relates them once again to the neglected but undying hopes of the people. It is the tracing of this basic pattern in the history of the English Utopia which is one of the main objects of this book.

There is one other important point that must be touched on: the conception in Cokaygne of the relation between man and nature. Medieval man was, as we have seen, strongly aware of his struggle against his environment. He felt deeply the hostility of the world, the briefness and uncertainty of life. Man was a stranger and a sojourner, passing from darkness to twilight and thence into darkness again, a darkness only slightly alleviated by the church's promises of heaven and rendered even more impenetrable and horrifying by its threats of hell. This was the source of the sense of the limitation of man which found its theological expression in the dogma of original sin. The church saw man and nature as

separate and opposed forces, and the duty of man to resist both the world and the worldly within himself. The struggle between man and the world was the only means of avoiding a collapse into brutishness, and, the nature of man being what it was, the mere avoidance of such a collapse, and the salvation of the individual soul, was the very most that could reasonably be looked for.

In Cokaygne there is implicit the rejection of this pessimistic and reactionary outlook. Here, happiness and the enjoyment of plenty in fellowship is the outcome of the establishment of a harmony between man and his surroundings, of the conquest of nature by man, but a conquest possible because man is a part of nature instead of being in opposition to it. In this way, Cokaygne can be seen as a rough and early foreshadowing of Humanism, the philosophy of the bourgeois revolution. About Humanism more will have to be said in relation to More and Bacon; what must be noted here is that, in spite of its narrow and mechanical conception of the nature of progress, Humanism was a necessary and valuable belief with its insistence on the possibility and fact of progress, as against the static world picture of Medieval philosophy, and on the goodness and dignity rather than on the sinfulness and helplessness of man. Humanism made it possible to believe that man could mould the world in accordance with his desires, whereas the church taught him that he could only save himself from the world. Without such a belief the very conception of Utopia is impossible, and this is why we find no conscious and fully developed utopian thought between the philosophers of the classical world and those of the dawn of the bourgeois revolution.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ISLAND OF THE SAINTS

Quick-witted Sir Thomas More traveld in a cleane contrarie province, for he seeing most commonwealths corrupted by ill custome, and that principalities were nothing but great piracies, which gotten by violence and murther were maintained by private undermining and bloudshed, that in the cheefest flourishing kingdomes there was no equall or well devided weale one with another, but a manifest conspiracie of riche men against poore men, procuring their owne unlawful commodities under the name and interest of the commonwealth: hee concluded with himself to lay down a perfect plot of a common-wealth or government, which he would intitle his *Utopia*.

THOMAS NASHE, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, 1594.

#### 1. *More the Humanist*

BETWEEN the writing of *The Land of Cockayne* and the writing of *Utopia* lie two hundred years, and in that time a great transformation had taken place. A rapid process of differentiation was taking place among the peasantry, and the feudal, subsistence economy of the middle ages was giving place to a modern economy based on the production of goods for sale in the market. In the fourteenth century, as we have seen, serfdom was already undergoing profound modifications: in the fifteenth it had almost disappeared and the serf had become a free cultivator. It would be wrong to cherish any illusions about this time, but it is not altogether without reason that it has been described as a golden age. Yet, in the very nature of things, such a state of affairs was only partial and transitory, and if England was ever merry the merriment was but short-lived. The breaking up of the medieval village commune emancipated the serf, but it also destroyed the very basis of his security: in freeing him from his attachment to the soil it created the conditions under which he could be driven off the soil altogether.

The creation of a free peasantry implies the development of an economy based on simple commodity production, and this in its turn implies the creation of a new kind of landowner, whose power was not based on the multitude of his dependants but on the amount of cash profit he could extract from his estates. In England this process was specially marked because England was

the main producer of wool, and wool was the article which more than any other could always be turned into money. At the same time, the wool industry, and the enclosures which it involved, was only the most outstanding example of a general tendency, so that when More wrote—

“Your sheep that were wont to be so meek and tame, and so small eaters, now, as I heare saye, be become so great devowrers and so wyld, that they eate up, and swallow downe the very men themselves,”

he was only describing in particular terms this general process, the replacement of a subsistence agriculture by an agriculture based on the production of goods for the market and the development of a purely money relation between the different classes drawing their living from the soil.

This process, together with the corresponding growth of merchant capital, of trade and of urban industry, which, though still on a handicraft basis, catered more and more for a national and even an international market, involved the birth of a new class, the proletariat. And, as More was one of the first to see, it was accompanied by the greatest amount of suffering and dislocation since the dispossession of the peasantry and the discharge of many of the retainers and other parasites of the old nobility whom the ending of internal wars among the nobility for the control of the state apparatus now rendered superfluous, ran far ahead of the absorption of the unemployed into industry. This was, indeed, the inevitable consequence of the fact that in England capitalism developed first in agriculture and trade and only afterwards and more slowly in industry, which remained on a petty, scattered and individual basis. In one of the best known passages in *Utopia* More describes the sufferings of this new, disinherited class.

“Therefore that one covetous and unsatiable cormaurante and very plague of his native contrey maye compasse about and inclose many thousand of akers of grounde together within one pale or hedge, the husbandmen be thrust owte of their owne, or else either by coveyne and fraude, or violent oppression they are put besydes it . . . by one meanes therefore or by another, either by hooke or crooke they must needes depart awaye, poore, silly, wretched soules, men, women, husbands, wives,

fatherlesse children, widows, woefull mothers, with their yonge babes. . . . Away they trudge, I say, out of their knowen and accustomed houses, fyndyng no place to rest in. . . . And when they have wandered abroad tyll [all] be spent, what then can they else doo but steale, and then justly pardy be hanged, or els go about a-beggyng."

The early sixteenth century was a black enough time: enclosures, widespread unemployment and beggary, prices rising far more rapidly than wages, savage repressive laws against the exploited, constant wars between the national states springing up out of the ruins of feudal society, corruption, if not greater than before, at least enjoying fuller opportunity. And out of it all there arose a general sense of bewilderment and despair. Everything known and secure seemed to be in question: the static, self-contained feudal world where the lord ruled over the manor and the Pope at Rome reigned over a universal and undivided Church was passing and there seemed nothing to take its place. Yet in fact, all this suffering and uncertainty, real as it was, was still rather a symptom of growth than of decay, though, as often in an age of rapid transition, it was the decay rather than the growth which was most apparent. Over and against the misery and as it were complementary to it, was a new growth, the rise of a great merchant class, strong and confident, mapping and parcelling the world, of great cities and new industries, and, to make this possible, of new powerful states governed by dynasties like the Tudors who had seized power over the bodies of the old nobility and had established an absolutism, which, for all its oppressiveness, was not without a genuine popular basis, since it stood for order, for national as opposed to local organisation, and for an internal stability and a secure and considerable market without which the position of the bourgeois could not be consolidated.

Such was the world in which Thomas More grew to manhood: a world of despair and hope, of conflict and contrast, of increasing wealth and increasing poverty, of idealism and corruption, of the decline at once of the local and international societies in face of the national state which was to provide the frame within which bourgeois society could develop.

More himself belonged to a body which welcomed the new order, to the class of rich London merchants who were one of the principal stays of the Tudor monarchy. His father was a prominent



lawyer, later a Judge—a member of the upper civil service which was increasingly being drawn from the ranks of the upper bourgeoisie. More was brought up in the household of Archbishop Morton, the chief minister of Henry VII, and, rather against his will, since he was strongly attracted by the life of scholarship, became himself a lawyer. Quite early he was elected to Parliament and he acted as the spokesman of the Londoners on a number of important occasions. In this way he was brought into close touch with national affairs, and finally, as we shall see, was drawn into the service of the crown, unwillingly and with tragic results. In 1529 he became Lord Chancellor, holding office with considerable distinction but with increasing discomfort till he resigned, in 1532, on account of his reluctance to carry out Henry VIII's church policy. Shortly after he was sent to the Tower, and, in July 1535, he was beheaded on a charge of treason. It will be necessary to discuss some parts of his career in greater detail in relation to the views he expressed in *Utopia*, but first of all it will be well to say something of his character and intellectual background.

Perhaps the fullest and most intimate picture of More is that given by his friend Erasmus in a letter to Hutten. Erasmus speaks of his "kind and friendly cheerfulness, with a little air of raillery," of the simplicity of his tastes, his capacity for friendship and his affection for his family. This was the impression More gave to all who knew him, and even today it is scarcely possible to read either his writings or those of his biographers without arriving at a sense of peculiar intimacy such as we receive from few other historical characters. We admire the man for his courage and honesty, for the simplicity which he combined with his learning and his capacity for affairs. More, like Swift, though not altogether for the same reasons, was one of those figures around whom an apocrypha gathers—a body of anecdotes which may not be true but which are valuable because they are in keeping with a brilliant personality vividly felt. And yet, behind it all, there is something else, something a little withdrawn and a little contemptuous of common life, which comes out most plainly in More's patronising treatment of his wives. We are constantly reminded that More was strongly drawn to the extreme austerity of life of the Carthusian order. We feel that though he would have been a delightful companion, equally prepared to discuss philosophy or to indulge in a gentle kind of practical joking, only a part of him would

have been engaged. At bottom it is the typical conflict between old and new, between the humanist and the medieval ascetic, which made him write of the married and celibate orders of labour monks that

“the Utopians counte this secte the wiser, but the other the holier.”

Perhaps it would be truer to say that Humanism itself, especially in England, was the field of such a conflict. Humanism, though it was a new doctrine, and the belief of a new historic class, still arose out of the dogmatic and scholastic thinking of the Middle Ages, and was shot through with the very things against which it was in revolt. So that we get at the one time, and even in the one person, the sceptical and pagan thought of the Renaissance and the puritan and dogmatic thought of the Reformation. Even in Italy, where Humanism was first established and most firmly rooted, this was so. Humanism reflected the boundless optimism of a new class which saw the world opening before it. It discarded the dogma of original sin and the conviction that Satan is the Lord of this world for the dogma that both man and world are only hindered by external checks from infinite improvement:

“You get at this time the appearance of a new attitude which can be most broadly described as an attitude of acceptance to life, as opposed to an attitude of renunciation. As a consequence of this there emerges a new interest in man and his relationship to his environment. With this goes an increasing interest in character and *personality* for its own sake” (T. E. Hulme, *Speculations*, p. 25).

This new attitude was not only the result of the emergence of a new progressive class but of a new conception of history. Up to this time men had been living in the shadow of the past. They looked back from the squalor of feudalism to the real and imagined glories of the ancient world as to a golden age. But at the close of the fifteenth century it would be roughly true to say that civilisation had reached and in some respects passed the level attained in the Graeco-Roman world. And, consequently, instead of looking back to a past more glorious than the present, it was possible to look forward to a future more glorious than either. This growth of civilisation transformed man's whole outlook;

"It was likely that as prosperity and stability of civilisation gradually increased, the distinction between nature and super-nature would become less and less harsh. The doctrines of 'grace' and 'original sin' may, as has been suggested, have arisen out of the despair accompanying the disintegration of the ancient world; 'but as life became more secure man became less otherworldly'" (Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, p. 33).

This future happiness was to be attained by the removal of all artificial and external checks, that is, by the exercise of reason, which meant in practice the adoption by princes and statesmen of the views of the Humanists.

"For whereas your Plato," wrote More, "judgeth that weale publiques shall by this means atteyn perfect felicitie, eyther if philosophers be kynges or else if kynges give themselves to the studie of Philosophie, how farre, I praye you, shall commen wealthes then be from thys felicitie if philosophers wyll vouchsaufe to enstruct kinges with their good counsell?"

And finally, though the common people had no part to play in this transformation of the world, Humanism at its best, in the hands of men like More, did look beyond the immediate future and the narrow class interests of the bourgeoisie towards the happiness of man as a whole.

Consequently, again, there was an internal contradiction and conflict. Humanism could not but be conscious of increasing misery as well as of progress, and the individual Humanists reacted either towards a superficial and hedonistic paganism or towards a moral earnestness and desire for social and religious reform. It was this latter aspect that was most strongly marked in England and Northern Europe, where Humanism never became very firmly rooted but remained, outside a group of intellectuals, a generalised and diffused influence which finally made its contribution, in a modified form, to the Revolution of the seventeenth century. And Colet, through whom more than through any other one man Humanism reached this country, had made his contact with it in Italy at a time when it was in its most highly Christian and serious phase, when the influence of Savanarola and of Pico della Mirandola was at its height.

Freed to a certain extent from the theological absolutes of

scholasticism, the Humanists felt the need for a new set of absolute values. These they found partly in a more rational Christianity, but even more, perhaps, in the works of Plato and the neo-platonists. Greek philosophy came to them afresh through the study of the original texts instead of the imperfect Latin summaries that had had to serve throughout the middle ages. And Plato, above all, with his conceptions of ideal truth, beauty and justice, discoverable by the exercise of the reason, and to which man and his institutions—churches, states, cities and universities—could be made to conform, appealed irresistibly to men who saw in history not a development towards new forms of society but towards their own form of society. The urban life of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had a sufficient superficial resemblance to that of the Greek city states to allow of the drawing of all sorts of parallels, some valuable and some, to our way of thinking, fantastic enough. Plato's *Republic* had been known, at second hand, throughout the middle ages, and it was inevitable that it should serve as the starting point for any draft of a model commonwealth.

Such a commonwealth was entirely static in character. Plato believed that what was necessary was to devise a city state with a sufficient hinterland and a fixed optimum population, to give it a finished and perfect constitution, regulating the relations of classes, the nature and scope of industry, the type and extent of the education necessary for the various classes, the religion best calculated to serve its social stability. The foundation-stone was justice—which meant the due subordination of classes and the recognition by all of their respective duties and rights. Such a state, he supposed, if it could once be established, might endure unchanged for ever.

These assumptions, in some cases modified, constitute the starting point of More's *Utopia*, but, to a large extent, they remain unstated. More was not concerned to repeat what had already been done in the *Republic*, to build logically, step by step, the principles upon which a commonwealth should be based. Instead, he takes the principles for granted and presents us with a living picture of such a Commonwealth already discovered in full working order. The result is a book that is narrower but far more lively and vivid than the *Republic*, the picture of a society so fully realised that More feels able to answer all doubts by saying, as it were, "But it really is so, I have seen it, and in fact it works."

And in some important respects More goes far beyond Plato. Utopia is not a city state, self-sufficient and self-contained, but a nation-state covering an area roughly that of England and having a full national life in relation to other states. Further, Plato's state was a small aristocratic community living on the labour of a large number of slaves and serfs, and its communism was confined to its ruling class. Plato advocated communism not because this is the only means of securing the abolition of class exploitation, but because he thought that a preoccupation with worldly goods was bad for the morals of his philosopher 'guardians'. More's Utopia was an approximation to a classless society, and was necessarily communist because he believed that

"where possessions be private, where money beareth all the stroke, it is harde and almoste impossible but there the weale publique maye justelye be governed and prosperouslye floryshe. Unless you thinke thus: that Justyce is there executed where all thinges come into the handes of evill men, or that prosperetye there floryshethe where all is divided amonge a fewe."

More had too great an experience of the world to believe that any class, however well intentioned and carefully educated, can possess state power without oppressing and exploiting the propertyless majority. Through the whole of his book the questions of the state, of class and of property are continually being raised, and, in the main, are answered in a strikingly modern way. It is to More's treatment of these fundamental questions that any serious and socialist analysis of *Utopia* must be directed, since it is its treatment of them which makes the book a landmark along the road towards scientific socialism. It is the link between the social theory of the ancient world and that of the present day.

This does not mean, of course, that it was not a book of its own time, written with a very close and deliberate attention to the contemporary situation. It is perhaps because of this close attention to what actually was, and to the tendencies and direction of his age, that More was able to look so far into the future. It was because he understood more clearly than those around him the changes that were then taking place that he was able to forecast the society which those changes were ultimately to make possible. He wrote *Utopia* at the turning point of his life and in the full maturity of his powers, In 1515 More was thirty-seven. He was the

honoured friend of the greatest scholars of his time, of Erasmus and Colet, of Linacre and of Grocyn. He had already sat in Parliament where he had distinguished himself by his opposition to the demands of the crown. He was an outstanding lawyer and a recognised leader and spokesman of the London merchants. And, though he had refused to enter the royal service, he was sent upon an important diplomatic mission to Flanders.

It was at Antwerp, in the course of this mission, that *Utopia* was begun, and it is in Antwerp that the machinery of the tale is laid. There, says More, in the house of one Peter Giles, he met Raphael Hythloday, just home after having set out upon a voyage with Amerigo Vespucci, in the course of which he had been separated from his companions and had spent five years in Utopia. Hythloday is described with a vividness recalling Swift and Defoe, and the substance of the book is what he told More and Giles in the course of an afternoon and evening. In a letter published at the end of the book Giles expresses his wonder at More's

“perfect and suer memorie, which could welniegh worde by worde rehearse so many thinges once onely heard.”

Only in one respect was this memory at fault—over the situation of the island:

“For when Raphael was speaking thereof, one of Master More's servauntes came to him, and whispered in his eare. Wherefore I being then of purpose more earnestly addict to heare, one of the company, by reason of cold taken, I thinke, a shippeborde, coughed out so loude, that he took from my hearing certen of his wordes.”

In this way the great secret was lost, “for we heare very uncerten newes” of Hythloday after this time.

An account of the voyage of Vespucci, in which Hythloday is supposed to have taken part, was printed in 1507 and was certainly well known to More. In it is described the simple, pre-class society of the Indian tribes encountered. H. W. Donner, in *Introduction to Utopia*, writes of this account:

“They despised gold, pearls and jewelry, and their most coveted treasures consisted in brightly coloured birds' feathers. They neither sell, he says, nor buy, nor barter, but are content with what nature freely gives out of her abundance. They live

in perfect liberty, and have neither king nor lord. They observe no laws. They hold their habitations in common, as many as six hundred sharing one building."

In 1511 Peter Martyr's *De orbe novo* appeared, giving an even more idealised account of the natives of the West Indies. Clearly these reports form part of the material that went to the making of *Utopia*, as More in effect acknowledges by making Hythloday the narrator. This picture of primitive innocence, as interpreted by the Humanists with their belief in the classical Golden Age and reinforcing the still unforgotten communist ideas of the Middle Ages, made an important contribution towards More's conception of a just society that looks at once backwards and forward.

Actually, the second book of *Utopia*, in which a detailed description of the country was given, was written in Antwerp in the autumn of 1515. The first book, which contains a long discussion on the nature of kings and the social condition of England, was added in the spring of the next year. The whole was published in Latin at Louvain towards the end of the year and between then and 1519 was republished in a number of European cities. It is curious that, in spite of the great success and popularity of *Utopia*, no edition was published in England in More's lifetime, nor was any English translation printed till Robinson's edition appeared in 1551. It is from Robinson's revised edition of 1556 that I quote, modernising the spelling to a certain extent. Since then a number of new and in some respects more accurate translations have appeared, but Robinson's has a warmth and a quality of style that seems to bring it closest to the original, and it is in this translation that More's book has passed into English literature.

It may seem strange that a book by so distinguished an author, and one that had such a wide and immediate influence, should have had to wait so long for publication both in the author's own country and in his native language. For this there were several reasons. After More's death his memory was proscribed so long as Henry VIII was alive. The Tudors maintained a strict control of the press and it would have required very great courage to issue a book by a man who had been executed as a traitor. And while More was alive he had probably no great interest in its appearance in English. He was a member of the international of scholars, among whom Latin was the common and familiar medium of com-

munication. So long as his friends in all countries could read his work he was satisfied, for, as we shall see, More was no revolutionary in the sense of wishing to arouse the people to a sense of their wrongs or to start any kind of movement among the mass of the exploited. But, more important still, the book sailed far too close to the wind for its immediate publication in English to be altogether safe. Not only did it advocate communism: that might have been passed over as the pleasant conceit of a platonic philosopher, but it contained the most savage criticism, explicit as well as implied, of the actual government of England. As Erasmus said:

“He published his *Utopia* for the purpose of showing what are the things that occasion mischiefs in commonwealths; having the English constitution especially in view, which he so thoroughly knows and understands.”

It was far wiser to leave such a book in a learned tongue and to allow it to be published unostentatiously in Louvain or Paris.

## 2. *More the Communist*

No one could possibly doubt that *Utopia* was a picture of an England in which money did not “bear all the stroke”, and with its criticism of the power and corruption of wealth went an equally devastating picture of the abuse of royal power. The Utopians certainly had a prince and a magistracy who, while they were in office, were given absolute authority within the limits of the constitution. But they were elected autocrats whose power was derived from the people and who were removable if that power was abused. In practice, moreover, the main work of the magistrate was to control and organise the economic life of the country:

“The chiefe and almooste the onely offyce of the Syphograuntes is to see and take heede, that no manne sit idle: but that everye one applye hys owne craft with earnest diligence.”

The obligation upon all to work (except for a small number of scholars who were deliberately set free to specialise in the pursuit of learning) had as its counterpart the right of all to enjoy the products of this social labour:

“In the myddest of every quarter there is a market place of all manner of thinges. Thither the workes of every familie be



brought into certeyne houses. And everye kynde of thing is layde up severall in barnes or store-houses. From hence the father of everye familie, or everye householder fetcheth whatsoever he and his have need of, and carrieth it away with him without money, without exchange, without any gage, pawne or pledge. For whye shoulde anything be denyed him? seeing there is abundance of all things, and it is not to be feared, leste any man wyll aske more than he needeth. For why should it be thoughte that any man woulde aske more than enough, which is sure never to lacke?"

This communism of the Utopians, based upon abundance and security, passes far beyond the vulgar equalitarianism of the petty bourgeois socialists who failed to see that equality could be nothing but the abolition of classes, and approaches the conception of the 'higher phase of communist society', where, as Marx said in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*,

"when the productive forces of society have expanded proportionally with the multiform development of the individuals of whom society is made up—then will the narrow bourgeois outlook be utterly transcended, and then will society inscribe upon its banners; 'From everyone according to his capacities, to everyone according to his needs!'"

More understood, what Morris understood later, but what many even among socialists still fail to understand, that this principle is not an idle fantasy but the only practical basis for the organisation of a classless society. Reason led the learned Humanist to the same conclusions as those already instinctively grasped by the simple men who had depicted *The Land of Cokayne*.

In some ways it was easier for them and for More to reach this conception than it has been for others who had to live in a fully capitalist society. England in the sixteenth century, in spite of the development of commodity production, still retained much of the primitive agrarian collectivism that had persisted under cover of feudalism. Though the family had an individual tenement, this land lay scattered with those of the other members of the township throughout the common fields and its working depended on the joint plough team and involved a considerable co-operation at certain times. And even in More's day, when the gap between town and country was widening, even quite considerable towns

had still their common fields, and when More writes of the Utopians that:

“When their harvest day draweth neare, and is at hand, then the Philarches, which be the head officers and bailiffs of husbandrie, send worde to the magistrates of the citie what number of harvest men is needfull to be sent to them oute of the citie. The whiche companie of harvest men being ready at the day appoynted, almost in one fayre day dispatcheth all the harvest worke.”

he had in his mind a picture not very different from what might still have been seen in the England of his own time. More's communism, that is to say, is not merely an imaginative picture of something that might happen in the future, but even more the extension and transformation of something already existing to the conditions of a society different from his own but nevertheless related to it and arising out of it.

The most difficult question was that of the means by which this transformation could be effected, and here More, in common with most of the Utopians, was at his weakest. Certainly he had not, and could not have had, any conception of the long, painful and still far from completed historical process by which capitalism was to create its antithesis. Consequently the picture of Utopia is touched with melancholy, rising to the conclusion:

“So must I needs confesse and graunte that many thinges be in the Utopian weale publique, which in our cities I may rather wishe for, than hope after.”

The least attractive feature of the Utopian life is its lack of trust in the ordinary activities of common people. Even in the communal dining-rooms the old must sit with the young, to “keep the youngers from wanton licence of wordes and behavioure”. There are to be “no lurking corners, no places of wycked counsels or unlawful assemblies. But they be in the presente sighte and under the eyes of every man”. No citizen may travel about the country, much less go abroad, without special leave from the magistrates, and, though this leave is easily obtained, “no man goeth out alone but a companie is sente forth”. And, though laws are few and punishments merciful by the standard of More's time, we have to infer that in spite of the

abolition of private property and of classes, crime is still common enough to provide a considerable number of bondmen. Man, in fact, is changed much less than his surroundings, and it is clear that this aspect of Utopia reflects More's own lack of confidence in the common man. This arises both from his own class position and that of the Humanists generally and from the whole relation of class forces at that time.

More came from the upper section of the London merchants, a class which always suffered in periods of disorder and which had just passed through the dislocation caused by a prolonged civil war. The memory of Cade's Rebellion, of which Shakespeare gives us the typical upper-class view, was still fresh and was reinforced by more recent disturbances. And More, who, as we have seen, frequently acted as the spokesman of the city, shared much of its outlook in spite of his genuine concern for the sufferings of the people. As Kautsky says:

"Now More was in a practical respect the representative of their interests, although in his theoretical outlook he was more advanced. Capital has always called for 'order', only occasionally for 'freedom'. Order was its most vital element; More, who had become great in the minds of the London middle class, was therefore a 'man of order' who disliked nothing more than the independent action of the people. All for the people but nothing by the people was his watchword."

He was not the man to lead a revolution, even if revolution had been possible, and later he looked with horror at the Peasant War in Germany, seeing in it a natural consequence of Luther's error in encouraging the masses to concern themselves in matters which they had not the capacity to understand.

It must also be remembered that the suffering masses in More's time were very far from being a proletariat in the modern sense of the word. They were expropriated peasants, servants turned adrift, or, at best, handicraftmen exploited by the rich merchants—More's own class. In any case they were *individuals*, just losing their accustomed occupations and social groupings and not yet reintegrated by the education of large scale machine industry. Such a class was capable of outbursts of revolt, dangerous in proportion to their sufferings and their despair. It did not afford the basis on which a new social order could be established. Yet, if Utopia was to be more than a dream, such a basis had to be

sought. This search gives us the key, not only to the understanding of *Utopia* but also to More's whole career, and it involves some consideration of the role of the state in the sixteenth century.

The modern state is one of the consequences of the rise of capitalism. Production for the market demands a larger unit than the medieval village or even the small town springing up around some castle or abbey. The state provides a national basis for production and distribution and a greater security for international trade. It ensures more efficient policing, better communications, uniform laws and customs and common standards of measurement. For all these things a strong central government is necessary, capable of reducing the nobility to order. Hence the king, who under feudalism in the form in which it existed in the Middle Ages is no more than the strongest landowner, now becomes the pivot of the state apparatus. It was this fact, together with the fact that the bourgeoisie is still in a state of transition, not strong enough to rule independently but ready to lend its support to a government which was capable of giving it the conditions necessary for its continued progress, which determined the form taken by the Tudor monarchy.

But the Tudor state had a double nature. The state was progressive because society was ready to emerge from feudal atomism: the state stood for social stability and organisation as against anarchy. And so the bourgeoisie, and therefore More and the Humanists, were bound to approve and support the growth of the state. On the other hand the state was clearly and openly predatory and oppressive and its rulers were obviously corrupt and selfish, so that any man who genuinely cared, as More did about social justice, could not but find himself frequently in opposition both to the state and to its rulers. Hence More's bitter inner conflict, which finds expression in the first book of *Utopia* and colours his whole life. The only hope of progress was for the Humanists to secure the ear of princes, to guide and mould their policies. But was this possible in view of the known character of the actually existing princes? "From the prince, as from a perpetual wel sprynge, commethe amonge the people the floode of al that is good or evell", without the prince nothing could be done, but did not this mean that the case was hopeless? So the argument develops between More and Hythloday.

Kautsky, I think, fails to understand the point of it:

"In estimating the book," he writes, "we must no more be misled by the homage paid to the King than we should judge the materialists of the eighteenth century by the reverence they occasionally accorded to Christianity. . . . More assigned the championship of his ideas to Hythloday, while he introduces himself as the critic of his ideas. . . . The whole passage is a scorching satire on the contemporary monarchy. It constitutes More's political confession of faith, and his justification for holding aloof from the Court."

Kautsky, consequently, finds it hard to understand More's subsequent action in entering the royal service and has some difficulty in defending him against the charge of inconsistency. I think it would be far truer to say that the dialogue, while it certainly voices a ruthless criticism of contemporary government, is an expression of More's argument with himself. Hythloday's criticisms certainly ring true, but so does More's reply:

"What part soever you have taken upon you, playe that as well as you can and make the best of it . . . you muste not forsake the shippe in the tempest, because you cannot rule and keep downe the winds. . . . But you must with a crafty wile and a subtell traine study and endeavour youre selfe . . . and that which you can not turne to good, so to order that it be not verye badde."

There could but be one outcome to such an argument. More did not wish to remain a mere satirist, isolated and ineffective. The chance that something could be done through the crown might be small, but there was no other chance. And so, regretfully and heavy with misgivings, More entered the royal service. His state of mind is mirrored in the speech which he made upon taking office as Lord Chancellor:

"I ascend this seat as a post full of troubles and dangers and without any real honour. The higher the post of honour the greater the fall, as the example of my predecessor [Wolsey] proves."

His misgivings were only too well justified. Henry had no use for a servant who wanted to help the people or remould society according to the dictates of philosophy. He wished to use More's

reputation for learning and sanctity and his powerful influence in the City as a cover for his own selfish policies. For nearly three years More attempted to reconcile conscience and policy, but in 1532 he felt himself bound to resign because of his opposition to Henry's divorce and to his attitude to church questions. Out of office he immediately became dangerous because his known integrity was a standing argument against what the king was set upon doing. It became necessary to win him over or to silence him. The former proved impossible: More was therefore sent to the Tower and in 1535 beheaded on a manifestly absurd charge of treason. He was the first, as he has been the last, philosopher to attempt to engage directly in the government of England.<sup>1</sup>

His tragedy was none the less moving because he made his attempt with such faint hopes and with his eyes so fully opened to the realities of the situation. He knew well what forces were at work, and how strong they were, as is well shown in the famous passage in *Utopia* on the state, a passage strikingly in agreement with the view reached centuries later by Marx, Engels and Lenin, and as strikingly at variance with that of every kind of Liberal and social-democratic political theorist from his time to ours.

"The riche men," he wrote, "not only by private fraud, but also by common laws do every day pluck and snatch away from the poore some part of their daily living. So whereas it seemed before unjuste to recompense with unkindness their pains that have been beneficiall to the publique weale, nowe they have to this their wrong and unjuste dealinge (which is yet a much worse pointe) given the name of justice, yea and that by force of a law. Therefore when I consider and weigh in my mind all these commonwealthes, which now-a-dayes any where do flourish, so good help me, I can perceave nothing but a certein conspiracy of riche men procuring their owne commodities under the name and title of the commonwealth. They invent and devise all meanes and craftes, first how to keep safely, without feare of losing, that they have unjustly gathered together, and next how to hire and abuse the worke and laboure of the poore for as little money as may be. These devices, when the riche men have decreed to be kept and observed under the coloure of the commonaltie, that is to saye, also of the poor people, then they be made laws."

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Bacon and the possible exception of Arthur Balfour!

The quotation that stands at the head of this chapter shows that in More's own time, or shortly after, this was recognised as one of the central ideas in the *Utopia*, for the importance of Nashe is that he was one of the acutest journalists of his time, a man with no new or profound ideas of his own, but with a remarkable aptitude for seizing upon whatever ideas were then current in intellectual circles.

This conception of the state differs in one important respect from that of modern socialism. It is unhistorical, allowing no place for growth and development. Consequently the establishment of a model commonwealth could only be a kind of accident or miracle, the work of a prince, who is imagined as something apart from the class forces which normally dominate the state. Utopia has very little history, but what we are told of its origin bears this out: the island was conquered by, and took its name from, the great King Utopus,

"which also brought the rude and wild people to that excellent perfection in all good fashions, humanity and civile gentleness."

Utopia *had to be* a miracle. More could see what was wrong and what was needed, but he would have been more than human to see at that time the historical process by which socialism could be realised.

There is a further deduction to be drawn from More's theory of the state. England was, as we have seen, a country of increasing wealth and increasing poverty. More was one of the first to see the relation between these facts, to understand that the rich were becoming richer because they were finding new and more effective ways of robbing the poor. Hence we find in his work what Morris calls

"an atmosphere of asceticism, which has a curiously blended savour of Cato the Censor and a medieval monk."

Kautsky, too, speaks of the frugality of Utopia as a feature contradictory to modern socialism. This is indeed the case. The Utopians rejected all luxury and display. Their houses, though made of the best material and carefully designed, were plain and simple, their clothes uncoloured and all cut to the same pattern, their meals ample and certainly far more balanced than those of the England of the time, but plain and moderate. Jewels were

playthings of children, and, as a lesson in the vanity of riches, gold was employed to make chains for bondmen, and for chamber pots.<sup>1</sup>

For this there were several reasons. To a certain extent it was a part of the common heritage of classicism of the Humanists, who, like the theoreticians of the French Revolution later, loved to insist on the stern frugality of the republican heroes of ancient Rome. But in the case of More there were other reasons, more personal and more important. The first was the connection, just mentioned, between wealth and poverty. More was revolted by the luxury of the ruling class of his time because he saw that this luxury was the result of the surrounding poverty. If poverty was to be banished from Utopia, the luxury which produced it must be banished also. The third reason was more positive.

The Utopians were no killjoys, opposed to pleasure and recreation in themselves:

“They be muche inclined to this opinion: to thinke no kind of pleasure forbydden whereof commeth no harme.”

More looked around at the ceaseless labour of the people which was necessary to provide the luxuries of the rich, and concluded that the most important end to be secured in Utopia was an abundance of leisure in which human faculties could be developed to the full, so that people could become real men and women and not mere drudges:

“The magistrates do not exercise theire citizens againste theire willes in unneedful laboures . . . so that what time may possibly be spared from the unnecessarie occupations and affayres of the common wealth, all that the citizens shoulde withdrawe from the bodily service of the same. For herein they suppose the felicitie of this life to consist.”

To any socialist society at some point or another a choice may present itself: more leisure or more production. In the modern world, with all the great and increasing resources of science and technique, this point would certainly not be reached till long after all the reasonable needs and desires of men have been satisfied. Indeed, it is possible that the problem may never really arise at all, that under socialism we really *may* have our cake and eat it. But

<sup>1</sup> Lenin has also suggested that gold should be used for the construction of public lavatories!



for More, living in a world based on handicraft production, it arose very sharply, and he solved it by insisting for his Utopians upon a maximum working day of six hours. This, as he shows in some detail, was ample for the provision of all necessities as well as for the comfort and pleasure needed to ensure that the best use was made of the ample leisure so secured.

One result of this ample leisure is the great importance of education in Utopia. Education was neither a mystery confined to a small literate class as in More's England, nor something doled out in carefully measured packets to children during a certain number of years and then forgotten because it had little or no relation to life, as in our own, but a continuous attempt to understand the world in which the whole people took part, and in which, though there were specialists in learning, these were not a sect isolated from the people, but the advance guard of the whole, the leaders of an enterprise in which all could participate. And learning was valued and respected, not as a thing in itself nor yet as an indication of a certain social standing, but as a means of developing man's capacities to their fullest.

For the rest, their leisure hours were spent by the Utopians mainly in some form of social recreation, conversation, music or games. More mentions two games not unlike chess, but all sports involving cruelty were forbidden and nothing is said of any form of physical exercises, probably because in that time these were the pastimes of the ruling class and there was not then the present large proportion of the population employed at cramping or sedentary tasks for whom some such active form of recreation is a necessary relaxation. Altogether it was a quiet, dignified and uneventful life which went on in Utopia, a land almost without history, a land with a constant population and a constitution and economy that had remained unchanged since the time of Utopus the Good. And there is little reason to think that the Utopians were not extremely happy in the same way that More himself was happy when at home with his family and his friends, and not vexed with the insoluble problems of social justice. It was, in fact, the life that More would have liked to be able to live, and one which could reasonably have been expected to tend to produce men like More.

It was further, as we have seen, a society without exploitation and therefore without classes. A few words should be said about the apparent exceptions to this. First were the magistrates, rising

in various grades to the king. But these were in no sense a class or caste. They were chosen freely from among the most able of the philosophers, as these were in turn chosen from the people, for their capacity. They had no special privileges and were subject to frequent re-election. Their children had the same education, upbringing and opportunities as those of the rest of the citizens, and no office was in any sense hereditary.

At the other end of the scale were the bondmen. These appear in Utopia for two reasons. First as More's solution to the problem of crime. In his time death was the normal penalty for most sorts of crime and hundreds of men were hanged every year for petty thefts and similar offences. Minor offences were punished by flogging, branding or exposure in the stocks or pillory. This, More saw, was not only inhuman, but, because of its inhumanity, actually helped to increase crime, which in any case sprang rather from the nature of society than from the inherent wickedness of the criminal. Rather illogically, he anticipated that crime would continue to exist on a considerable scale in Utopia<sup>1</sup> and he proposed as a remedy to employ criminals to do all the unpleasant and degrading jobs which he supposed his free citizens (whose freedom included the right to choose their own trades) would not willingly undertake, or which he was unwilling to allow them to undertake because of the moral dangers involved. This system of bondage, if it seems out of place in a classless society, was at least far more humane and far more practical than anything that existed in the sixteenth century. And secondly, this system was a positive solution of the problem, with which socialists are always being faced, of who will do the unpleasant work in a socialist society. It is a problem which is now ceasing to exist as the development of technique reduces the amount of such work, but it is one with which many of the Utopian writers have been faced and which they have solved in a variety of ways. It was a very real problem for More, who had to construct a socialist society on the basis of hand production. He solved it, as we have seen, partly by reducing wants through the abolition of luxury and partly by this system of bondsmen. It must be noticed, however, that the bondsmen do not constitute a class, any more than convicts constitute a class in modern society. They were condemned to their tasks partly as punishment but more with the hope of reformation. In many

<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps he allowed himself to be a little illogical in order to have the opportunity of preaching his sermon on the proper way to deal with criminals.

cases their bondage was temporary. But in no case did it affect the position of their families, who had all the normal rights of citizenship.

A similar problem is that of the relation of town and country. In the Middle Ages the country was dominant, the town, with a few exceptions, no more than an enlarged village. But the development of capitalism created a continually widening gulf, the town became more and more a centre of independent life with a distinctive urban culture, the country more and more its tributary and the country workers more and more sunk in what Marx rather harshly calls "rural idiocy". The town and the new class of capitalists became identified with what was thought of as progress, the country identified with stagnation. It would be hard to say whether town or country has suffered the greater loss by this separation, and it is one of the tasks of socialism to restore the unity of town and country on the higher plane of a common social life. More had his own solution, based, again, on the existing level of technique and transport, within the conditions of which life in the country could not but be ruder and more isolated than that of the towns.

Agriculture was carried on by large households and all citizens had the obligation to spend at least two years in the country, each city having its rural area which it supplied with labour and from which it received its food. In this way everyone learnt the rudiments of agriculture and a much larger labour force could be mobilised on special occasions. This was done

"to the intent that no man shall be constrainede againste his will to contynue long in that harde and sharpe kynd of lyfe, yet manye of them have such a pleasure and delyte in husbandrye that they obteyne a longer space of yeares."

In this way the feeding of Utopia was secured without cutting off any of the people from the civilised life which More regarded as proper to man: at the same time the townsmen were not cut off from the simpler and more primitive life of the countryside.

One more detailed point requires consideration, especially as it has led to some dispute and misunderstanding. This is the religion of Utopia and the religious toleration practised there. Unlike England and all other countries known to More, Utopia was able to accommodate a variety of religions. These were all monotheistic and sufficiently similar and undogmatic to allow of a

common form of worship which did not offend the followers of any. Priests were of exceeding holiness "and therefore very few". Hythloday began the conversion of the Utopians to Christianity, with which their pre-existing religions did not greatly conflict. The peculiarity of the Utopians, however, was that the principle of toleration was fully recognised, King Utopus having made a decree that "it should be lawfull for everie man to favoure and folow what religion he would". Even atheists were tolerated, though they were forbidden to advocate their views publicly and were not eligible for any public office.

This undoubtedly represents More's view of what is desirable, and it is often argued that when he became Chancellor his conduct in attacking and even persecuting Lutherans was at variance with and a descent from, the doctrines he had preached in *Utopia*. More, in fact, is held to have sinned against the Light. Such a view is, I think, mistaken. Setting aside the question of how far More actually was a persecutor, about which there is some doubt, it can only arise from a failure to understand what he really says in *Utopia*. His position is perfectly clear. After referring to the decree of Utopus which I have quoted above, he goes on to say that everyone had the right to persuade others to his belief, so long as this was done peaceably, "without displeasing and seditious words,"

"To him that would vehemently and ferventlye in this cause strive and contende, was decreed banishment or bondage."

This was More's own principle of action. We have seen that he distrusted and feared any popular movement or any violent overturning of the existing order, and to him Lutheranism, with its appeal to the masses and its apparent responsibility for the risings of the peasantry in Germany, was such a movement. With individual Lutherans he was able to enjoy friendly relations, but against the movement, which seemed to him to threaten ruin and chaos, he could not but struggle. I am not here concerned with the right or wrong of this attitude: what I am trying to show is that this attitude was logical and self-consistent, arising from the limitations imposed upon him by his class and age, limitations which no-one, however talented, can wholly escape.

And, after all, what is remarkable about More is not his limitations but the extent to which they were transcended, not the fact that his tolerance had limits but that the principle of toleration

was so plainly set forth, not the occasionally reactionary features of his *Utopia* but its broadly communist economy, not his fear of popular action but his understanding of the causes of poverty and his real desire to remove them. And if, as I have tried to show, his life and writings form a logical and consistent whole, it is in the *Utopia* that these essential features show most clearly. Here the thought is most luminous, the passion most evident, and here, in the nature of things, the socialism which could not but be obscured in the practical difficulties that beset the statesman was able to find its fullest expression. And it is as a pioneer of socialism rather than as a saint or a philosopher that More is enduringly important.

*Utopia* is at once a landmark and a connecting link. It is one of the great works of controlled and scientific imagination in which the classless society is visualised and mapped out. And at the same time it is the link connecting the aristocratic communism of Plato, and the instinctive, primitive communism of the Middle Ages, with the scientific communism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This modern communism has two main strands or legs, and More, with his successors among utopian socialists, provides one of them. But even in More's day there was another socialism, that of Munzer and the peasant revolutionaries, which in its turn passes through a clearly defined channel: through the Levellers, the left wing in the French Revolution, the Luddites and the Chartists, till it too is ready to find its place in the structure of Marxism. More could not understand this other socialism, and what he saw of it he hated and feared. This was natural, for the synthesis of the philosophic and the popular socialism could not take place before the creation of the revolutionary class, the proletariat, for which it was the appropriate theory. It is enough that More was More without our needing to regret that he was not also Marx.

It does, however, follow from this that it is not till modern times that his *Utopia* could be properly understood. Until the birth of scientific socialism it was no more than a dream, a pretty fantasy. Readers could admire this commonwealth in which peace and justice were the ruling principles, but could only conclude regretfully, with More, that such a commonwealth was more to be wished than hoped after. Today, when the power to establish such a commonwealth lies ready to our hands, it is possible to see how exactly, within the limits imposed on him by the narrow

handicraft technique of his age, More anticipates the most essential features of a modern, classless society. It is fitting, therefore, to quote in conclusion the words of the first great English Marxist, William Morris, who is also the writer of the only book of its class which is worthy of a place beside *Utopia*:

“We socialists cannot forget that these qualities and excellencies meet to produce a steady expression of the longing for a society of equality of conditions; a society in which the individual man can scarcely conceive his existence apart from the Commonwealth of which he forms a portion. This, which is the essence of his book, is the essence also of the struggle in which we are engaged. Though doubtless it was the pressure of circumstances in his own days that made More what he was, yet that pressure forced him to give us, not a vision of the triumph of the new-born capitalistic society, the elements in which lived the new learning and the new freedom of thought of his epoch; but a picture (his own indeed, not ours) of the real New Birth which many men before him had desired, and which now indeed we may well hope is drawing near to realisation, though after such a long series of events which at the time of their happening seemed to nullify his own completely.”

## CHAPTER III

### REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

*Ireton*: All the main thing that I speak for, is because I would have an eye to property. I hope we do not come here to contend for victory—but let every man consider with himself that he do not go that way to take away all property. For here is the most fundamental part of the constitution of the kingdom, which if you take away, you take away all by that. . . .

*Rainborough*: Sir, I see that it is impossible to have liberty but all property must be taken away. If it be laid down for a rule, and you will say it, it must be so. But I would fain know what the soldier hath fought for all this while? He hath fought to enslave himself, to give power to men of riches.

*Debate of the General Council of the Army.* Putney, October 29th, 1647.

#### I. *New Atlantis*

AT no other time is there such a wealth of Utopian speculation in England as in the seventeenth century. And at no time is this speculation at once so bold and practical and so dry and narrow. In this age of revolution Utopia comes closest to immediate politics and the everyday problems of government, and in doing so it loses as well as gains. More, as we have seen, was concerned with the relation of wealth and poverty, with the abolition of classes, and, ultimately, with the questions of human happiness and social justice. The typical Utopian writers of the seventeenth century are concerned with political questions in the narrow sense, with the framing of a model constitution and with its working machinery, with the formation and character of governments and the perfection of parliamentary representation. They are concerned, in short, not so much with justice as with power.

As a result, there is a complete change in temper and style. We find nothing to correspond to More's breadth of vision, his pity and anger, his doubts and the wry humour with which these doubts are expressed. Everything now is dry, precise and lawyer-like. There is a cool confidence, a bright, hard certainty that here, in Macaria or Oceana, is the one true light, that here is a practical programme that need only be adopted to carry the revolution to its full perfection. And, to a very large extent, this confidence was justified, for the problem which had baffled and tormented More

had been solved, the bourgeoisie had won power, had the means of making their desires effective. Hence, as this Chapter will try to show, there was a close relationship between the Utopian writings and the active framing of constitutions which went on throughout the Commonwealth period.

This change in the climate of Utopia corresponds exactly to the change in the English political climate. We have seen something of the beginnings of the development of capitalism; of the growth and decline of classes, the transfer of wealth and the peculiar relations which existed between the bourgeoisie and the House of Tudor. The Tudor absolutism gave the men of the new wealth the necessary shelter and breathing space in which to grow strong: ample advantage was taken of this opportunity, till, by the end of the century, the protection had ceased to be a necessity and the protector had become a burden. In alliance with the crown the bourgeoisie had decimated the peasantry, humbled the church, crushed Spain, traversed oceans and explored new continents. Now, appearing for the first time in history as an independent force, they attacked the monarchy itself, deposed and beheaded a king and established a republic. For a brief space Utopia ceased to be a fiction but was felt by thousands to be just round the corner. If there were any limits to the power of this brave new class, they were not immediately apparent.

Before the confident morning of the revolution there was a rather bleak dawn period, the generation in which the alliance between crown and bourgeoisie was breaking, when the tension of events created bewilderment, weariness and disillusion. It was the period of Shakespeare's tragedies, the age when the bounding extravagance of *Tamburlaine* had given place to the extravagant psychological horrors of Webster. To this period belongs Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and in the history of the English Utopia Bacon is the link connecting More with the utopian writers of the revolutionary period.

Like More, Bacon was a member of a family which was prominent in the service of the crown, was trained as a lawyer but combined the profession of law with a continuing passion for philosophy, became Lord Chancellor of England, and, at the height of his fortune, was disgraced and driven from office. Here, however, the parallel ends, for few men have ever been more dissimilar in their interests or character. There is perhaps no great English writer whose personality is less attractive than Bacon's, and all the



elaborate apologies of his many admirers and the power and magnificence of his prose only increase the distaste we feel in the presence of the man. Never was such a subtle and splendid intellect employed to serve meaner or more trivial ends, and neither pride nor gratitude nor loyalty to friends were allowed to brake his climb to wealth and influence. Grasping timidity and profuse display seemed continually to deny the austere impersonality of the philosopher's creed.

Yet this is only a part of the truth about Bacon: it would be quite wrong, I believe, to imagine that the philosophy was not both sincere and profoundly felt. Partly, it may be, the very subtlety of the intellect deceived itself, but more than that, Bacon's character expresses in a new form the essential contradiction within Humanism, the contradiction that lies at the very heart of the bourgeois revolution. Humanism fought to liberate mankind from superstition and ignorance, but also to liberate capitalist production from the restraints of feudal economy: the bourgeois revolution was waged for the ultimate advantage of mankind as a whole but also to secure for a new exploiting class power to rob and to become rich, and in this revolution meanness and nobility, cruel oppression and generosity are inextricably tangled. The pursuit of truth and the pursuit of wealth often seemed the same thing, and, whatever Bacon's faults may have been, about the pursuit of truth he was always passionately in earnest.

And truth for Bacon meant power, not indeed political power, since he was a loyal servant of the crown and well content with the existing order, but power over nature through the understanding of natural law. This is the core of all his work, and not least of the *New Atlantis*, which, under cover of describing a utopian commonwealth is really a prospectus for a state-endowed college of experimental science. It was the work of his old age, written when, over sixty, he was dismissed and ruined, but still hoping against all reason that he might be restored to power. It was a fragment only, begun and laid aside unfinished, and never published in his life-time. He began it in the hope that James I would adopt and subsidise his proposals: its incomplete state is the proof of the final abandonment of his hopes, and therefore of his interest in the work, since that interest was confined solely to its possible practical outcome.

Bacon, unlike More, was not concerned with social justice. He, too, was a Humanist, but by the beginning of the seventeenth

century Humanism had run cold: the difference between *Utopia* and *New Atlantis* is not so much a difference of content as a difference of purpose, a shift of interest and a lowering of temperature. The earlier Humanists believed in reason and in the possibility of the attainment of happiness by the unfettered exercise of reason. Bacon and his contemporaries, while not denying the power of reason had gradually shifted the weight of emphasis away from reason to experiment. As Bacon wrote:

“Our method is continually to dwell among things soberly. . . to establish for ever a true and legitimate union between the experimental and rational faculty.”

And elsewhere:

“For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff and is limited thereby; but if it work upon itself, as the spider worketh its web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of the thread and work, but of no substance or profit.”

Bacon stood at the beginning of the first period of materialism, in which it was confidently believed that the whole universe, from the solar system to the mind of man, was a vast and complex machine and could be mastered absolutely by a sufficient understanding of the laws of mechanics. He saw it as his task to use his prestige and his incomparable control over language to urge upon his contemporaries the undertaking of this final assault upon the mysteries of nature. As Basil Willey says in his admirable book, *The Seventeenth Century Background*:

“Bacon’s rôle was to indicate with fine magniloquence the path by which alone ‘science’ could advance. This he did, while other men, such as Galileo, Harvey or Gilbert, in whom he took comparatively little interest, were achieving great discoveries on the principles which he taught. Bacon’s great service to ‘science’ was that he gave it an incomparable advertisement.”

The information which we are given about the social and economic and political organisation of Bensalem, the utopian island of *New Atlantis*, is naturally, therefore, meagre and indirect, since Bacon only intends the fiction to provide an interesting

background for the pamphlet. But one cannot but be struck with the remarkable decline from the standpoint reached in *Utopia*, and, since Bacon had obviously read More's book, this may be taken as an implied criticism in the points where they differ. Bensalem is a monarchy of an orthodox type, with the inevitable fixed constitution handed down from the founder-king Salomona. It has private property and classes, as we have to infer from a passage which says that on certain ceremonial occasions

"if any of the family be distressed or decayed, order is taken for their relief, and competent means to live."

That is to say, that while the necessities of the poor are provided for, this is done as a charity and not as of right, and the need for such charity appears normally to arise. Correspondingly there are marked social gradations and inequalities, and the officials and leading citizens are distinguished by magnificent clothes and lavish display and have numbers of personal servants.<sup>1</sup> There is a strongly patriarchal family, quite unmarked by any trace of the communism with which More tempered family life, and great power is enjoyed by the heads of these families and by the old generally.

Chance voyagers, like the narrator of the story, were welcomed in Bensalem and received hospitably, but intercourse with foreign lands was discouraged because King Salomona,

"recalling into his memory the happy and flourishing estate wherein his land then was, so as it might be a thousand ways altered to the worse, but scarce any one way to the better; thought nothing wanted to his noble and heroical intentions, but only, as far as human foresight might reach, to give perpetuity to that which was in his time so happily established; therefore . . . he did ordain the interdicts and prohibitions which we have touching the entrance of strangers."

At the same time, as was fitting for a people given up to the search for knowledge, every effort was made to discover and import all that was known in other lands, and with this object

<sup>1</sup> We are reminded that Aubrey says of Bacon: 'None of his servants durst appeare before him without Spanish leather boots; for he would smelle the neates leather, which offended him.'

secret missions were sent out at regular intervals to visit all civilised lands and bring back reports.

To Salomona, also, was credited the establishment of Salomon's (or Solomon's) House, whose 'fellows' were the object almost of veneration among the Bensalemites. Here we come to Bacon's real point: *New Atlantis*, like Bensalem itself, exists only for the sake of it. And in nothing more than in his ideas about education does Bacon differ from More. For More, as we have seen education was a social and co-operative pursuit, with its object the increasing of the happiness and the enrichment of the personalities of the whole people: for Bacon it was the affair of a body of specialists, lavishly endowed by the state and carrying on their work in complete isolation from the masses (we are told that the visit of one of the fathers of Salomon's House to the capital city was the first for a dozen years). Its object was not happiness but power:

"The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible."

There is a kind of holy simplicity in this unbounded belief in man's powers that is the most attractive side of Bacon and which makes him the truly representative man of his time, but this same simplicity limits his objectives to the quantitative and the empirical. There is little in Bacon of the desire to pass beyond catalogue to synthesis, and he was a superb generaliser with a deep distrust of generalisation.

For this reason the methods of Salomon's House were purely experimental, and to the cataloguing of experiments Bacon devotes the ten happiest pages of *New Atlantis*, describing a great variety of metallurgical, biological, astronomical and chemical marvels, as well as the practical application of science to the making of new substances and fabrics, to medicine and even to engineering:

"We imitate also the flights of birds: for we have some degree of flying in the air: we have ships and boats for going under water. . . . We have divers curious clocks and other like motions of return, and some perpetual motions. We imitate also the motions of living things by images of men, beasts, birds, fishes and serpents."

Bacon hoped to interest King James, who prided himself upon his virtuosity and delighted to be called the modern Solomon, in his scheme, and, no doubt, dreamed that the foundation of such a college of science might lead to his return to public life and favour. In this he was disappointed, for James had little interest in science for its own sake and already the political struggle was curtailing the resources of the crown.<sup>1</sup> It was not till 1645, under the rule of the Long Parliament, that Bacon's scheme assumed a modest practical form as the "College of Philosophy". Its founders, Samuel Hartlib, author of the utopian essay *Macaria*, and the Czech scholar Comenius, both admitted that their scheme was inspired by *New Atlantis*. Similarly, when the College of Philosophy developed into the Royal Society in 1662, Sprat, Boyle, Glanville and others declared that this was only the carrying into effect of Bacon's outline of Salomon's House. Later still, it was among the main influences which determined the form to be taken by the work of the French Encyclopedists. Diderot, in the Prospectus, stated specifically:

"If we have come at it successfully, we shall owe most to the Chancellor Bacon, who threw out the plan of an universal dictionary of sciences and arts, at a time when, so to say, neither arts nor sciences existed. That extraordinary genius, when it was impossible to write a history of what was known, wrote one of what it was necessary to learn."

*New Atlantis*, therefore, belongs to the history of science as much as to the history of Utopia or to the history of politics. Nevertheless, the development of science and industrial technique was an essential part of the advance of the bourgeoisie, and, as I have said, Bacon's preoccupation with applied science as a form of *power* links him with the extremely political utopian writers of the Commonwealth with whom the next section will have to deal.

## 2. *The Real and the Ideal Commonwealth*

The revolution in England was rich in heroic achievement: it was rich also in heroic illusion. This is a necessary feature of all bourgeois revolutions, since their promises are far removed from

<sup>1</sup> James is said to have remarked, upon the publication of the *Novum Organum* that 'it is like the peace of God—it passes all understanding'.

their results, and their real meaning is often obscured even from those most actively engaged in them. They promise freedom for all, and, more often than not, the promises are sincerely made, but the freedom they actually secure is always the freedom for a particular class to pursue its own ends, while for the masses, whose support is enlisted and whose hopes are aroused, the advantages are indirect and often dubious, and always fall far short of what was anticipated. In seventeenth-century England as in eighteenth-century France the wild expectations of universal brotherhood and prosperity were cruelly disappointed and the defeat and consequent widespread disillusionment of the unprivileged led in the end to a partial restoration of the old régime, to a compromise between the different sections of the exploiting classes which left many questions unsolved but left also the road clear for future advances.

In England especially the religious forms in which the revolution found expression caused the dreams of the masses to take the most extravagant shapes. The whole period is one of fantastic speculation, human power and divine power run side by side and become at times almost interchangeable. Men felt everywhere that they were doing God's work and God theirs. The overthrow of the royal power was not merely a political change but the ushering in of the rule of the Saints and the sign of the coming Millennium in which Christ would appear in person to put the seal of his approval upon the work his people were doing. For a time the Fifth Monarchy Men became a powerful political force and the Kingdom of God on earth seemed a practical possibility.

As early as 1641, with the calling of the Long Parliament, such visions were abroad. Hanserd Knollys wrote in that year:

"This is the work that is in hand. As soon as ever this is done, that Antichrist is down, Babylon fallen, then comes in Jesus Christ reigning gloriously; then comes in this *Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth*. . . . It is the work of the day to cry down Babylon, that it may fall more and more; and it is the work of the day to give God no rest till he sets up Jerusalem as the praise of the whole world. . . . God uses the common people and the multitude to proclaim that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. As when Christ came at first the poor received the Gospel—not many noble, not many rich, but the poor—so in the reformation of religion, after Antichrist began

to be discovered, it was the common people that first came to look after Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Nor was it only the poor, nameless and ignorant enthusiasts, who expected this Millenium. Their expectation was shared by many of the finest minds of the time. Milton, in the same year, was declaring his belief that England would be

"found the soberest, wisest and most Christian people at that day, when Thou, the eternal and shortly expected King, shall open the clouds to judge the several Kingdoms of the world, and distributing national honours and rewards to religious and just commonwealths, shalt put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming Thy universal and mild monarchy through heaven and earth."

We might almost say that the Eden of *Paradise Lost* was Milton's Utopia, a Utopia which contains many of the traditional features of the Earthly Paradise<sup>2</sup> described in Chapter I, and which, in the first enthusiasm of the revolution he had hoped to see realised on earth. Later, after the slow fading of hopes under the Commonwealth and the final blow of the Restoration, he transferred his Eden to the distant past and the distant future, but, "because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it", there was a time when he had indeed thought that men might eat of the forbidden fruit and become as gods, knowing good and evil. For Milton the tragedy of the Fall was not that man was wrong to desire this knowledge of good and evil but that the promises of the serpent were false promises (like the

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to see how Jerusalem and Babylon develop from mainly religious into social and political symbols. Robert Burton (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621, Part III, Section 1) quotes Augustine: "Two cities make two loves, Jerusalem and Babylon, the love of God the one, the love of the world the other; of these two cities we all are citizens, as, by examination of ourselves, we may soon find, and of which."

An army hymn of the Civil War period has the lines:

"The Lord begins to honour us,  
The Saints are marching on;  
The sword is sharp, the arrows swift  
To destroy Babylon."

Blake carries the process much further, for which see p. 124, below.

<sup>2</sup> It may be argued that it is rather the case that Cokaygne contains many of the features of the Biblical Eden. Perhaps this is then the case: the important thing is that Eden and Cokaygne *both* contain a number of traditional features common to a number of mythologies in various parts of the world. And the thing that has to be explained is not really the diffusion of these myths but their abiding popularity in the minds of the people.

promises of the bourgeois revolution itself) and that this knowledge and the power it could give were proved in the event to be something to which man was not able to attain. The paradise which Milton lost, then, was the early promise of the revolution.

If Milton was the supreme religious Utopian of the English revolution, his Utopia was so concealed that he himself was probably unaware of it as such. There are, however, religious Utopias of this period of a more conventional pattern though on an incomparably lower level. One of these is Samuel Gott's *Nova Solyma*, already referred to. This was published in Latin in 1648 and republished in 1649. It does not seem to have attracted much attention and was forgotten till it was discovered and translated in 1902 by the Rev. Walter Begley, who attributed it to Milton for no better reason than that he could think of no one else capable of creating so sublime a masterpiece. In fact, as I have said, it is a book of a dullness and ineptitude scarcely to be imagined.

The framework of fiction is of the usual type. *Nova Solyma* is discovered and visited by two young gentlemen from Cambridge, Eugenius and Politan, who are entertained and instructed in the customary hospitable manner. Its inhabitants, without exception, exhibit all the worst characteristics of the Puritan of hostile tradition, narrow-minded and hysterical piety, smugness and intolerance. A good deal of the book is taken up with descriptions of their educational arrangements, which have neither the Humanist breadth of More nor the passionate scientific interest of Bacon. The book also discusses, to quote its editor,

"the master passion of love, which is considered philosophically, Platonically and realistically . . . the Romance has also much to say on Religion, on Conversion, Salvation, the Beginning and End of the World, the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, of Almsgiving, of Self-Control, of Angels and the Fall of Man, and Man's Eternal Fate."

It is perhaps hardly to be expected that in addition to all this Samuel Gott should have much to say about the economic and political organisation of the *Nova Solymnians*, and, in fact, these questions are virtually ignored. We are allowed to deduce that there are classes and private property, wealth and poverty side by side, very much as they were to be found in the non-utopian lands of the time.



*Nova Solyma* is, however, by no means the most extreme example of what the Puritan writer could do when he really let himself go. For this we must turn to John Sadler's *Olbia: The New Island Lately Discovered*, first published in 1660 and never, so far as I can discover, republished. The title page promises a description of "Religion and Rites of Worship; Laws, Customs and Government; Character and Language", and the book opens well enough with a pilgrim whose ship is driven out of its course by a storm. On page 3, however, he is wrecked on a rocky islet and rescued by a hermit whom he barely thanks before starting to complain that he is "the wretched object of the Creator's wrath". The hermit then consoles and exhorts him through 380 pages. Much of his discourse is devoted to an exposition of numerical mysticism, of which the last paragraph of the book is a fair sample:

"And they lie dead (as we saw before) for 3 days and a half; or 84 hours: which end in hour 324; the *Morning Sacrifice*, of the 14th Day: whose Evening *Minha* beginneth in hour 333; which added to 1332 (the other two *Moeds*, or twice 666;) comes just to 1666; the Evening before the Feast of *Tabernacles*, when also, *The Tabernacle of God shall be with men*: if we have reckoned right. Which may yet be more cleared by our Tables and Characters, if God so please."

The book breaks off, obviously unfinished, but whether Sadler ever did complete it and describe the Laws, Customs and Government of the Olbians it is impossible to say. It is conceivable, though unlikely, that a utopian masterpiece lies awaiting discovery in some old library or cupboard. Probably the political atmosphere of 1660 was unfavourable for the publication of millennial speculations. The real interest of this curious book is as an example of the wild extravagance of such speculations at the close of the Commonwealth period and its illustration of the way in which such speculations tended to be linked up with the utopian form. The decadence of these speculations parallels exactly the political disintegration and bankruptcy of the left-wing political parties and movements in the last years of the Republic.

Besides divine power working through men there was also human power working directly upon events, and it would be as great a mistake to imagine that all the men of the English Revolution were religious fanatics as to underestimate the part

played by religious fanaticism in this period. Along with the Fifth Monarchy Men and the millenary enthusiasts, and sometimes co-operating with them, were sober and secular-minded political theorists, men like Walwyn, Petty, Ireton and Vane, and, among the utopian writers, Samuel Hartlib and James Harrington. Their Utopias, *Macaria* and *Oceana*, are entirely matter of fact and political, and illustrate some of the fundamental tendencies of the period.

In both of them the element of fiction has been cut down to the barest framework. Where More, and to a much smaller extent Bacon, were interested not only in the formal structure of their imaginary commonwealths but also in the *quality* of the living of their peoples, Hartlib and Harrington only used the fictional form as a convenient peg upon which to hang model constitutions. There are no people in these Utopias, only institutions. *Macaria* and *Oceana* belong, as it were, half-way between *Utopia* and such essays in constitution-making as *The Agreement of the People*, and like *The Agreement*, were seriously advanced by their authors as practical schemes which could profitably and immediately be put into operation in England. This absence of the element of fiction is, perhaps, the main reason why these Utopias are now so seldom read, since, once the circumstances to which they were a response have ceased to exist, it must be confessed that they are somewhat devoid of life and colour.

It is only to be expected, of course, that at a time of revolution, when great changes were in the air, the Utopias would be more practical and less imaginative than at times when their authors saw little hope of their realisation. And the English Revolution, like all bourgeois revolutions, was specially marked by the endless elaboration of paper constitutions, some of which were actually adopted in practice. The reason for this elaborate constitution-making in the bourgeois revolution, which was also marked in America and France, is its double and ambiguous character. The bourgeois revolution is always the work of a combination of class forces, the bourgeoisie drawing into the struggle, under the banner of freedom from privilege, big sections of the lower classes. As a result, when once the first stage has been passed, a further struggle tends to develop between those sections which want to limit the revolution to the ending of feudal privilege and royal absolutism and those determined to proceed to destroy or limit the power of the men of property, without which, as is

quickly discovered, the democracy for which the masses supposed themselves to have been fighting is unattainable.

The result is an attempt to strike a balance and stabilise the actual situation in a written and irrevocable constitution. Usually the constitution-making is done by the men of property, who see in it a barrier against further democratic inroads, though sometimes, as in the case of *The Agreement of the People*, it is the left wing who want to establish themselves at a point which they have reached but which it appears likely to be difficult to hold without such support. In the main however, it is the right and centre parties who seek to establish an absolute and unchallenged *law*, preventing further changes from either direction. And in practice, as in England, a number of such balances are arrived at temporarily until one is reached which really reflects the actual relation of class forces.

The key question was that of property. The bourgeoisie fought to establish the absolute right to private property against royal claims and the less clear-cut but more restrictive conceptions of feudalism: in the first period of the revolution, therefore, the claim of the bourgeoisie to an absolute right to enjoy and use their property was objectively progressive. In the second stage, when the lower middle classes were pressing for a fuller democracy to complete the revolution, the rights of property became a barrier behind which the rich entrenched themselves to resist the demands of the Levellers. In the Putney Debates, quoted at the head of this Chapter, Ireton, the most conscious theoretician of the men of property argued:

“The objection does not lie in that, the making of the representatives more equal, but in introducing of man into an equality of interest in this government who have no property in this kingdom. . . . You may have such men chosen, or at least a major part of them, as have no local or permanent interest. Why may not these men vote against all property?”

Against this argument Rainborough replied with a clear statement of human rights:

“I do very well remember that the gentleman in the window said that if it were so, that there were no propriety to be had, because five parts of the nation, the poor people, are now excluded and would then come in. So one on the other side

said that if it were otherwise, then rich men only shall be chosen. Then, I say, the one part shall make hewers of wood and drawers of water of the other five, and so the greatest part of the nation be enslaved."

And Sexby similarly:

"There are many thousand of us soldiers that have ventured our lives; we have had little propriety in the kingdom as to our estates, yet we have had a birthright. But it seems now, except a man hath a fixed estate in this kingdom he hath no right in this kingdom. I wonder we were so much deceived."

It was this internal struggle which led to the degeneration of the Commonwealth and made the Restoration possible. It was to prevent such conflicts and to give the republic a firm and permanent basis that Harrington wrote *Oceana*, and it is to such arguments and passions as these that we must look for the background of that least passionate of books. Before discussing it, however, something must be said of the earlier and less important *Macaria*.

*A Description of the Famous Kingdom of Macaria* was published in London in 1641,<sup>1</sup> when the Long Parliament had met and had already won its first important victories. It is to that Parliament that it is dedicated:

"Whereas I am confident, that this honourable court will lay the corner-stone of the world's happiness, before the first recess thereof, I have adventured to cast in my widow's mite into the treasury; not as an instructor or counsellor to this honourable assembly, but having delivered my conception in a fiction, as a more mannerly way; having as my pattern Sir Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon, once Lord Chancellor of England."

It is in the form of a dialogue between a Scholar and a Traveller, and the latter begins:

"In a kingdom called Macaria, the King and the governors do live in great honour and riches, and the people do live in great plenty, prosperity, peace and happiness.

"*Scholar*: That seemeth to me impossible. . . ."

Macaria, as is suitable for a Utopia of the dawning bourgeois revolution, is organised on state capitalist rather than communist

<sup>1</sup> Macaria means 'blessed' and according to More was a country not far from Utopia.

lines. "All traffick is lawful which may enrich the kingdom", but all is controlled by a great Council, under which are Councils of Husbandry, Fishing, Trade by Land, Trade by Sea and New Plantations. The last of these organised state-aided emigration.

What is quite new in Utopian literature is the method by which the institutions of Macaria are to be introduced into England. For the first time, this is not the work of a benevolent Prince but is the result of convincing the people of the benefits of such a change. To bring this about the Scholar promises that in his next sermon he

"will make it manifest that those that are against this honourable design, are first enemies of God and goodness; secondly enemies to the Commonwealth; thirdly enemies to themselves and their posterity.

"*Traveller*: Why should not all the inhabitants of England join with one consent to make this country to be like Macaria. . . .

"*Scholar*: None but fools or madmen will be against it."

So Utopia begins its second phase, that of belief in the power of persuasion and enlightened self-interest. The time is still far distant when the real nature of the problem of class power will be clearly understood.

*Macaria* belongs to the first stage of the Revolution, the stage of easy confidence and hope. *Oceana*, which was not published till 1656, though much of it had probably been written considerably earlier, belongs to the closing years of doubt and exhaustion. Already a whole series of experimental constitutions had been tried and had failed. Harrington believed that he knew why, and hoped, not perhaps very confidently, that his plan would be adopted in time to save the republic.

Harrington was a characteristic but isolated figure. Born in 1611, he was a member of a powerful landowning family. As a young man he showed a great interest in political problems, but, instead of taking part in the struggles of the time, he travelled abroad, studying the institutions of foreign states, especially those of the great aristocratic merchant republics of Holland and Venice. He had also a considerable knowledge of Greek and Roman history, and, as a result, became a convinced republican at a time when even the most advanced of the practical politicians had no thought of doing more than bringing the royal power

under the control of Parliament. Yet, with this strong, academic republicanism, he had an equally strong personal attachment to King Charles, and, when Charles was in the hands of the Army, he became Groom of the Bedchamber, a post that required someone who possessed the confidence of both parties. John Aubrey, his close friend, writes that

“King Charles loved his company; only he could not endure to heare of a Commonwealth.”

In the actual struggle of the Civil War he took no part and he deeply deplored the king's execution. Once the Commonwealth had been established, however, his republican convictions made him desire its success, and it was to Cromwell that his *Oceana* was dedicated.

In spite of this he had some difficulty in obtaining permission to publish it. Olphaeus Megalator, who stands for Cromwell in *Oceana*, is made to resign his office at the height of his power, setting up a free republic. Consequently the book remained for some time in the hands of the censor, and Toland, who edited Harrington's works with a short biography, records Cromwell's characteristic comment:

“The Gentleman had like to trepan him out of his power, but what he got by the sword he would not quit for a little paper shot: adding in his usual cant, that he approv'd the Government by a single person as little as any of 'em, but he was forced to take upon him the office of a High Constable, to preserve the Peace among the several Partys in the Nation, since he saw that being left to themselves they would never agree to any certain form of Government.”

In this there is no reason to think Cromwell insincere. He understood to the full the weaknesses of the Commonwealth, if not their root cause, and, in his last years, wrote and spoke as a man without real hope.

And, indeed, the class contradiction at the root of the Commonwealth was so profound that no artificial constitution, however subtly contrived, could have prevented its fall. Nevertheless, Harrington's scheme was based on the appreciation of a great truth, whose clear enunciation gives him an important place in the development of the conception of historical materialism. The character of a society will depend, he believed, upon the

distribution of property among the classes within it. By property he meant landed property, but in the seventeenth century land was still the most important form of property, and he was ready to admit that in certain states, such as Holland and Venice, where this was not the position, his generalisation could bear a wider application. He crystallises it in the dictum:

"As is the proportion or balance of Dominion or Property in Land, such is the nature of the Empire. If," he continues, "one man be the sole Landlord of a territory, or overbalance the People . . . the Empire is absolute Monarchy.

"If the Few, or a nobility with the Clergy be landlords or overbalance the People . . . the Empire is mix'd Monarchy, as that of Spain, Poland and late of Oceana [England].

"If the whole people be Landlords, or hold the Lands so divided among them that no one Man or number of Men, within the compass of the Few or Aristocracy, overbalance them, the Empire (without the interposition of Force) is a Commonwealth."

The foundation stone of Oceana, therefore, was an Agrarian Law, dividing the land, not indeed among the whole people, since Harrington was by no means a believer in complete democracy, but among a large number. This was done by a decree that no-one might hold land valued at more than £2,000. This, he argued, would ensure that the number of landowners would never be less than 5,000 and would in practice be far more, since it was unlikely that all would have the maximum holding. In order to break up estates still further he proposed to abolish primogeniture, so that all estates were to be divided equally between the sons of the owner. Such an Agrarian Law would give the Commonwealth a firm basis, in much the same way as the Reformation settlement in England was assured by the number of people who had an interest in retaining the lands taken from the church. It is worth noting in this connection the firm basis that the French Revolution did secure later by its wide division of the land among the peasantry. Political power in Oceana was not confined to the landowners but was so distributed that they had a decisive influence. What was being proposed in effect was that England should become a country of small landlords and solid freeholders.

Once the foundations of the Commonwealth of Oceana had

been secured by this division of the land, Megalator was able to introduce Harrington's other proposals for the reform of the machinery of Government. These were the secret ballot, both in the election of representatives and in the Parliament itself, indirect election, a system of rotation by which one third of the members of Parliament and of all elected bodies resigned each year and so the whole membership was changed every three years, and a two-chamber Parliament in which the upper and smaller house, with a higher property qualification, debated but did not vote, while the lower house voted but did not debate. Harrington seems to have regarded this lower house as a kind of indirect referendum.

None of these proposals was absolutely new. Harrington's method was historical rather than empirical and he adopted devices he knew to have been used in the ancient world and in modern states, especially in Venice, for which he had always the greatest admiration. What was new was their combination and the proposal to apply them to the government of a great nation state instead of to the cities and close corporations to which they had hitherto been confined. What he aimed at was a democracy that would avoid corruption and bureaucracy on the one side and, on the other, the irresponsibility of the common people, in whom, like most gentlemanly political thinkers, he had little confidence.

Under the Commonwealth corruption had by no means been destroyed. Winstanley, in a vivid passage in his *Law of Freedom in a Platform*, had remarked:

"If water stands long it corrupts. . . . Some officers of the Commonwealth have grown so mossy for want of moving that they will hardly speak to an old acquaintance."<sup>1</sup>

Harrington proposed to avoid this by allowing the greatest possible number of people to participate in the actual work of government. By the indirect ballot and the property qualification, as well as by his double chamber system, he hoped to avoid the "excesses" of democracy.

Much of *Oceana* is taken up with speeches in the Senate and with

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from H. F. R. Smith's *Harrington and his Oceana*. Smith points out that Harrington must have been acquainted with the writings and activities of Winstanley and the Diggers, who also made a redivision of the land essential to the establishment of a true Commonwealth. The Diggers, who were mainly proletarian, proposed a much more radical and communist re-division than did Harrington. Winstanley's *Law of Freedom*, though it is direct propaganda and not in the form of fiction, might well be reckoned among the Utopias of the seventeenth century.



a variety of detailed projects that are now of minor interest. Some of these are fantastic, as the, probably not very serious, proposal to plant Panopea (Ireland) with the Jews, to whom it could become a new national home. Others, like the scheme for a sort of People's Army, were quite practical in the conditions then existing. Few Utopias have attracted more immediate attention. A gigantic pamphlet literature, for and against, sprang up around *Oceana*, while in the last years of the Commonwealth a definite Party developed, whose members were drawn chiefly from the more secular wing of the Republicans. Among Harrington's followers or close associates can be reckoned Henry Neville, Marten, Algernon Sidney and John Wildman, formerly a leader of the Levellers. In the Parliament that met in January, 1659, there were ten or a dozen avowed Harringtonians who lost no opportunity of advancing his constitutional proposals.

In the same year Harrington founded the Rota Club, perhaps the first purely political debating society, whose business was conducted strictly according to Oceanic principles. It was a remarkable platform for completely free discussion and many of the most distinguished men of the day took part in its proceedings either as members or visitors. With the Restoration the Rota, like all other forms of republican activity, was proscribed, and Harrington, with Wildman and others, was imprisoned. He was afterwards released, his health broken by close confinement, and, Toland says, by overdoses of Guaiacum, prescribed to him as a cure for the scurvy. In his last years he was troubled with a

“deep conceit and fancy that his perspiration turned into flies and sometimes into bees,”

but apart from this obsession he was quite rational and lived quietly in the country till his death in 1677.

With the Restoration the political influence of *Oceana* came to an end in England, but in the American and French Revolutions, when attention was turned once more to the shaping of constitutions, its influence again became important. John Adams and James Otis, among others in America, were enthusiastic admirers of Harrington's work, and the constitution of Massachusetts embodied so many of his ideas that it was actually formally proposed to change the name of the State to *Oceana*. The influence of Harrington's ideas can also be seen in the original constitutions of Carolina, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and it was probably as

a disciple of Harrington that Adams insisted so strongly upon a two-chamber Congress for the Union.

In France the Abbé Sieyès included in the constitution which he drafted, and which was adopted in 1800, some of Harrington's most important proposals, notably indirect election and the division of the legislature into two chambers, one of which debated and the other made decisions. The scheme was a failure because the second chamber became a quite formal body ratifying decisions which in fact had been reached elsewhere, and because, as always, the inner logic of the bourgeois revolution was too powerful to be arrested by any constitutional expedients, however carefully worked out. Nevertheless, the fact that in both the American and the French Revolutions Harrington's Utopia was the one to which the acutest political theorists turned, is a proof of its close relation to the actual problems of a revolutionary age.

### 3. *Utopia and the Reaction*

It might have been expected that the Restoration period would have little or nothing to show in the way of Utopian literature: that this is not the case is a strong proof of the popularity and unfailing appeal that books of this kind have had. The Restoration Utopias are of low quality and contribute little of positive value to the development of the Utopian conception. They are of considerable interest, however, because of the closeness with which they reflect the change in the régime and the new political atmosphere. In this connection it is highly significant that two of the four books to be considered here are continuations of Bacon's unfinished *New Atlantis*, since of all the major Utopias this is the least radical and politically advanced.

The first of these continuations, *New Atlantis. Begun by the Lord Verulam, Viscount St Albans; and Continued by R. H. Esquire. Wherein is set forth a Platform of Monarchical Government*, was published in London in September, 1660, in the first flush of royalist enthusiasm. It is dedicated, with unconscious irony to

"My most Sacred Sovereign Charles II. If in the ensuing character of a puissant and most accomplished Monarch all your Majestie's Princely Vertues are not fully portraied (for I am sensible the picture may seem drawn with too much shadow) I shall humbly beg your gracious pardon; this being

only the first draught of that immense beauty a more deliberate hand perhaps could have delineated in more lively colours."

Like Charles, Salomona was pleased to regard himself as the father of his people and was accustomed to call them his children, but we are told that:

"His chastity was singular, he never being seen to converse with any woman but his Princely Spouse or some of his nearest relations."

He was equally noted for his abstemiousness, his usual drink being a little sugared water. He did, however, take pleasure in watching horse-racing, which in Bensalem was managed without jockeys!

Many of the incidental details are plagiarised from More, but all More's specifically progressive features are omitted. Most of the narrative is in the form of a dialogue between the imaginary narrator and a Bensalemite magistrate or Alcaldorem. The author obviously does not understand the real nature of the Restoration settlement, but naïvely imagines that England had now returned to the state of affairs which existed before the Revolution. The Alcaldorem, asked how Bensalem can be governed without a Parliament, replies:

"The people of Bensalem have it as a received maxim among them that their Salomona neither can nor will do them any injury, they being the members of the body whereof he is the head,"

and adds that in England it is to be doubted if Parliaments will long continue, at any rate in their present power. He goes on to expound the theoretical basis of the constitution:

"We conceive *Monarchy* the nearest to perfection, that is, to God, the wise Governor of the Universe, and therefore best."

The nobility depend on the Monarch for their advancement and the people are loyal, peaceable and virtuous.

As befits a monarchy, the government and social structure throughout is entirely patriarchal, and many of their features look back to the Middle Ages. Every man must have a trade which he is forbidden to change, magistrates have the power to regulate industry and the quality of all goods produced, to keep the public granaries stocked and to enclose commons and

wastes. Landlords are obliged to let land on long leases and at fixed and reasonable rents. The advance of technology and science in the seventeenth century is reflected, however, in the obligation of tenants to plant half their pastures with lucerne or one of the other artificial grass crops then coming into fashion in England, and in the great variety of manures used. In general, though, this Utopia is a simple-minded attempt to go back, not only to the period before the revolution, but beyond that to wipe away many of the economic and social changes which led up to it.

The second continuation of *New Atlantis* was the work of Joseph Glanvill, a much more considerable writer and public figure than the anonymous R.H. Glanvill was closely associated with the Cambridge Platonists, the last offshoot in England of renaissance Humanism. The Cambridge Platonists, Henry More, Cudworth, John Smith and others, were a well-defined school who attempted to turn the tables both on the mechanical materialists and the enthusiasts of the Puritan sects by demonstrating the *reasonableness* of religion, and especially of the Anglican Church. In this way they met with considerable success in an age which was attaching more and more importance to reason but which still wished to reconcile reason with revealed religion. Glanvill himself was both an Anglican clergyman and a Fellow of the Royal Society. In his own day he was accused of atheism on account of his early book, *The Vanity of Dogmatising*, and later has been regarded as a credulous fanatic for his *Saducismus Triumphatus* in which he tried to prove the reality of witchcraft. Neither of these accusations is really just, for what he was actually trying to do was to link the experimental materialism of Bacon with the rational mysticism of the Cambridge Platonists.

In his continuation of *New Atlantis* he describes Bensalem in the throes of revolution, although this revolution is looked at almost entirely from the standpoint of the theological struggle. He sees the revolution, therefore, as a conflict between right reason and irrational fanaticism. When the Bensalemites had deposed and murdered their 'Pious Prince', the way was opened for every form of extravagance and unreason. The Ataxites, the Puritan Party

"all cried up their own class as the *only Saints*, and *People of God*: all vilified *Reason* as *Carnal*, and *Incompetent*, and an enemy to the things of the Spirit. . . . All talk'd of their extraordinary *Communion* with God, their *special Experience*,

*Illuminations and Discoveries*; and accordingly all demeaned themselves with much sawciness and irreverence towards God, and contempt of those that were not of the same phantastical Fashion."

Against them Glanvill set up a rival school, drawn from the Cambridge Platonists, who restore to religion reason, moderation, simplicity and dignity—in short, bring about an Anglican revival:

"They told the Ataxites that though they talk'd much of *Closing with Christ, Getting in to Christ, Rolling upon Christ, and having an interest in Christ*; and made silly people believe there was something of *Divine Mystery* or *extraordinary spirituality* under the sound of these words; that yet, in good earnest, either they *understood not* what they said and mean'd nothing at all by them; or else the sense of them was but *believing Christ's Doctrines, obeying his laws, and depending upon his promises*; plain and known things."

As a result of their efforts the Ataxite Party was discredited and overthrown and Bensalem returned to reasonable religion and monarchical government. Glanvill's interests were not really political, but, so far as I can discover, his is certainly much the earliest Utopia in which an actual revolutionary struggle is described. The Revolution had brought with it the understanding that societies are constantly developing and being transformed through man's conscious efforts. For this reason, in spite of his very slight interest in politics as such, Glanvill's is an important contribution to the history of the English Utopia. It should be added that the work, as published in 1676, is itself incomplete. It is a part only of a much longer book in continuation of *New Atlantis* which is known to have existed in manuscript but which has now been lost.

The third of our Restoration Utopias has, strictly speaking, possibly no place in this book, since it was probably the work of a French writer, Denis Vairasse d'Allais. But it was actually published in an English translation in London (1675-9) two years before the French edition appeared. In this English version it is attributed to an imaginary Captain Siden. It illustrates both the set of opinions we have noted already in the two continuations of *New Atlantis* and some other interests characteristic of the period both in England and France.

There is the same marked decline in political interest, and in its place there is a lively curiosity about the doings and manners of a strange people, an interest that can almost be described as anthropological and which is clearly the effect of the active exploration of the remoter parts of the earth and their opening to European intercourse and commerce.

*The History of the Sevarites or Sevarambi* tells how after the Flood the Earthly Paradise was transported to a region South-East of the Cape of Good Hope and peopled with a new creation, resembling men but not identical with them. It has many of the characteristics of the Earthly Paradise of Cokaygne described in Chapter I, such as limitless abundance and a complete absence of poverty. On the other hand, Severambè, being a seventeenth-century Utopia, has a society based on reason and natural law, and, inevitably, is ruled by a hereditary, despotic and quasi-divine king. In this respect, and like the other Utopias of the time, its organisation has a close likeness to that outlined by Hobbes in his *Leviathan*, though it is not possible to say whether this was due to a direct influence or to the general effect of the absolutism existing in France and the struggle of Charles II to re-establish absolutism in England.

There is no indication that the writer was very interested in such political questions, once he had paid his tribute of flattery to the prevailing orthodoxy. This done, he proceeds to deal in detail and real animation with all sorts of sexual and miscellaneous customs of Severambè, and with the various marvels to be found there. There was, for example, a special kind of temporary marriage for travellers:

“Because many among us are sometimes obliged to travel and leave their wives at home, we keep in all cities a number of women slaves appointed to their use, so that we do not only give to every traveller Meat, Drink and Lodging, but also a Woman to lye with as openly and lawfully as if she were his wife.”

This was doubtless a reflection of some Eastern modes of hospitality, news of which was becoming current in Europe.

The treatment of crime also receives some attention, and among criminals the Severambi seem to have reckoned lawyers. This is partly the normal hostile reaction of simple people to the law, but the passage suggests that it may also be the result of

the considerable part that lawyers in England had played during the Civil War:

"On both sides were the lawyers' Cells or little Closets. These are a certain number of men, who are locked up as Prisoners in their place, and not suffered to range up and down the city, for fear they should infect the rest of men with their idle notions and Quirks. They are all kept, the Judges only excepted, as our mal and craftie men in Europe, are confined to Bedlams, and as the wild beasts to their dens; for by this policy they preserve the city in quiet."

In spite of the stress placed upon reason in Severambè, this Utopia shows none of Bacon's enthusiasm for science. Its place is taken by a great variety of magical talismans, by which wonders are worked, especially the unnatural changing and distortion of the shapes of animals, in which the people appear to have taken a peculiar delight.

It is indeed, the political and cultural innocence of the author of this Utopia which gives it its main interest, showing how much the prevailing political atmosphere could affect what is really only meant to be read as a wonder tale. As a wonder tale it has close connections with the type of Utopian romance which became more widely current in the next century. It is a forerunner of the Rousseauesque glorification of the simple aborigine and of Diderot's *Supplement to Bougainville's 'Voyage'* in France, and, in England, of the work of such different though related writers as Swift, Defoe, Berington and Paltock.

A similar innocence marks a tale that deserves at least a mention here both for its authorship and its remarkable anticipation of *Robinson Crusoe*. *The Isle of Pines* (1668) was the work of Henry Nevile, wit, republican and closest associate of Harrington. Nevile was widely credited with a share in the production of *Oceana*, though nothing could less resemble that ponderous book than his own acknowledged work. Nevile's hero, George Pine, like Crusoe, was wrecked on an island which,

"being a large island, and disjoined and out of sight of any other land, was wholly uninhabited by any people, neither was there any hurtful beast to annoy us. But on the contrary, the country was so very pleasant, being always clothed in green, and full of pleasant fruits, and variety of birds, ever warm, and never colder than in England in September; so that this place, had it

the culture that skilful people might bestow on it, would prove a paradise."

In this paradise Pine, like Crusoe, had the blessing of securing all the stores of the wrecked ship, and, unlike Crusoe, of the company of four women saved from the wreck with him. Such use did he make of all this that he and they lived in the greatest ease, prosperity and happiness, and, when eighty years old, and after fifty nine years upon the island, he was able to count his descendants to the number of one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine. It is the secular and a-moral character of this little utopia that is most striking. Neville like Harrington and Marten, was an outstanding representative of the rationalist element in the English Revolution: in the Parliament of 1659, in which he was the leader of the Harringtonian group, an attempt was made to unseat him on the ground of his alleged atheism. And on their island Pine and his women-folk live according to their natural inclinations without the slightest regard to moral laws or any external prohibitions, with results that appear satisfactory to all concerned. It is the triumph of natural human goodness left to assert itself. If the setting here anticipates that of Crusoe's island the spirit is rather that of Diderot and the French Enlightenment.



## CHAPTER IV

### REASON IN DESPAIR

Fades the Republic; faint as Roland's horn,  
Her Trumpets taunt us with a sacred scorn . . .  
Then silence fell: and Mr Long was born.

CHESTERTON.

#### 1. *The End of Cokaygne*

WHEN Churchill's troopers triumphed at Sedgemoor they rode down the last defenders of Cokaygne, the Utopia of all jolly fellows, of the proud, independent man, neither exploiting nor exploited, eating and drinking of his own abundance. For this was one half of the Levellers' dream, and, I think, more than half of the Levellers' strength. On the one side they were modern, rational, civilised in a measure above that of their time. On the other, they were medieval, traditional, appealing to the deep-lying desires and perpetually thwarted hopes of the people. Their power lay in the synthesis of the past and the future: their weakness and the inevitability of their defeat lay in its incompleteness and in the gap which existed between it and the objective reality of historical development—a gap far deeper and wider than that Bussex Rhine on Sedgemoor in which Monmouth's army met its defeat.

But if it was a peasant army and a peasant Utopia which went down, the ultimate victory did not rest with the Catholic-feudal counter-revolution. This was not merely another of the long series of peasant insurrections crushed by feudal power; it was the final defeat of the plebeian element in the Bourgeois Revolution, and, with that defeat, the necessity for the upper bourgeoisie to compromise with the remnants of feudal society also came to an end. Churchill might indeed ride to Sedgemoor as James Stuart's man: he rode home already beginning to think that William Nassau might pay a better price for his services. The ultimate victors at Sedgemoor were the Whigs, the men who three years later organised the so-called "Glorious" Revolution of 1688.

The events of 1688, while not a revolution in the true sense,

consolidated the victory won by the bourgeoisie forty years earlier. Advances far beyond what the bourgeoisie either needed or desired, alternating with partial and temporary successes of reaction, had filled the intervening period. Now a compromise, corresponding roughly with the objective balance of class forces, had been reached—the time had come for the victors to gather the fruits. So 1688 established the power of the great merchants and financiers, allied with the Whig nobility who had transformed themselves into capitalist landowners. This combination, irresistibly strong, made politics a closed shop and created the apparatus needed for the rapid accumulation of capital leading to the agricultural and industrial revolution of the latter part of the eighteenth century.

The great epoch of the seventeenth-century Revolution had been an age of enthusiasm and wild hopes, of bold speculations and the clash of ideas. All this now ended: heroism, self-sacrifice, disinterestedness, passed so clean out of fashion that the very words acquired a slight flavour of impropriety. Every thing and every man now had its known price and honour became a commodity like all the others. Instead of Laud we find Sacheverell, instead of Cromwell, Walpole, while the nearest the eighteenth century could come to Lilburne was John Wilkes. "Silence fell, and Mr. Long was born." Men felt that the wars had brought nothing about, but this was far from the truth: what had been created was the condition for a rapid expansion of trade and industry, the establishment with the Bank of England and the National Debt of a 'modern' financial system, a long series of colonial wars in which English capitalism established its right to exploit vast new territories. In the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie, which had emerged out of and in contradiction to feudal society, and had fought for and won political power, transformed itself into modern capitalism and, breaking the last links which had bound it to the old feudal order, established itself and its specific mode of production as a part of the recognised order of things.

And of all this a young man who had fought at Sedgemoor on the losing side, and, three years later, had been on the winning side with William of Orange, was the first prophet. Daniel Defoe, in his pamphlet *An Appeal to Honour and Justice* (1715), defined both his own standpoint and that of the new order with singular exactness:

"I was for my first entering into the knowledge of Public Matters, and have ever been to this day, a sincere lover of the Constitution of my country, zealous for Liberty and the Protestant Interest; but a constant follower of Moderate Principles, a vigorous opposer of Hot Measures of *all* Parties. I never once changed my opinions, my principles, or my Party: and let what will be said of changing sides, this I maintain, that I have never once deviated from the Revolution Principles, nor from the doctrine of Liberty and Property on which they were founded."

For Defoe, as for Churchill, 'Liberty and Property', or, more accurately, 'Liberty *for* Property', came to be identified with the House of Orange and the Protestant Succession, and, indeed, as things were, no real alternative existed after 1685. For Churchill, to whom changes of allegiance came as easily as they have to other members of his family, no difficulty was presented—but Defoe? Defoe who has at least the honour of having fought in the last battle of English liberty? Did he never feel that his new principles were a betrayal of what his comrades had fought and died for under the sea-green banner that Monmouth had inherited from the Levellers?

If he did, he certainly never said so except perhaps indirectly. When Robinson Crusoe escaped from Saltee he took with him a negro slave boy, Xury, whom he promised 'to make a great man', and for whom he professed a lively affection. When at the end of their voyage they were picked up by a Portugese ship, the captain

"offered me also sixty pieces of eight more for my boy Xury, which I was loth to take, not but what I was not willing to let the captain have him, but I was very loth to sell the poor boy's liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in procuring my own. However, when I let him know my reason, he owned it to be just, and offered me this medium, that he would give the boy an obligation to set him free in ten years, if he turned Christian, and Xury saying he was willing to go with him, I let the captain have him."

The only real regret Crusoe ever expressed over this transaction was when he found that he could profitably have made use of Xury's labour himself. Is it fanciful to see in this negro slave boy

Defoe's old comrades of the Left, and in the captain, perhaps, William of Orange? Possibly, though Defoe expressly invites us to interpret *Robinson Crusoe* in just this kind of way:

"The adventures of Robinson Crusoe are one whole scene of real life of eight-and-twenty years, spent in the most wandering desolate and afflicting circumstances that ever a man went through, and in which I lived a life of wonder, in continual storms . . . in worse slavery than Turkish, escaped by as exquisite management as in the story of Xury and the boat of Salce, been taken up at sea in distress . . . in a word there is not a circumstance in the imaginary story but has its just allusion to a real story."

Whether Defoe had any intention of drawing it, the parallel is certainly there, and the whole episode is entirely in keeping with the times: that is why Defoe is the characteristic writer and *Robinson Crusoe* the characteristic Utopia of the early eighteenth century, just as Churchill is its characteristic public figure. It was this horrifying combination of the objectively progressive with the morally squalid in the Revolution of 1688 which bewildered so many of the best men of the day: it was this perhaps which turned the incorruptible Ferguson into a Jacobite, it was this which created an agonising and insoluble problem for those who had more old-fashioned ideas of loyalty than Churchill and greater intellectual subtlety than Defoe.

Among the former was an Irish soldier, as great perhaps if less fortunate than Churchill, who was also with the victorious army at Sedgemoor. Among the latter a young man who in 1685 was an unsatisfactory student at what he regarded as a most unsatisfactory university—Trinity College, Dublin. If Churchill and Defoe are typical figures on the one side, Sarsfield and Swift can stand for the best on the other, and it is perhaps significant that we have to go to Ireland to find them. In England the 'Revolution' stood, in however debased a way, for the Good Old Cause: Ireland could offer no Good Old Cause, since, whoever won, the Irish people were certain to be enslaved and exploited. Sarsfield was no politician but a simple and honourable soldier. He took what seemed to him the inevitable course under the circumstances, and, after his famous defence of Limerick, migrated to Europe with many of his men and was killed at Landen in 1693. Swift's fate was more complex and will detain us longer, since he was to

write the second and the greatest utopian work of the age—*Gulliver's Travels*.

Swift came from a family traditionally Royalist: his grandfather had been ruined for the support he gave to Charles I in the Civil War. His father and uncles came to Ireland to try to restore the family fortune. So Swift was veritably born into contradiction: neither English nor Irish he seemed at times to hate equally the lands of his origin and his adoption: often he insists that he is an English gentleman who happened to be born in Ireland, but it was in Ireland that he became a national figure, respected and loved as few have been before or after him.

Yet his career as an Irish patriot was the result of little more than an accident. When he left the University it was to England that he turned as a matter of course to make his name in politics and letters. While acting as personal secretary to Sir William Temple, that admirable nonentity, he published his first brilliant satires, *The Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. Later he took orders, rather unwillingly, and divided his time between his Irish parish of Laracor and the polite literary world of London. Presently he made himself the indispensable pamphleteer of the Tories. His savage wit, his brilliance in polemic, his arrogance and the overwhelming force of his personality made him, for some years, an outstanding figure in English politics.

Yet, it may be said, what was he after all but a Tory hack writer? I think that Swift's Toryism needs a few words of explanation. Swift accepted, albeit regretfully, the 'Revolution' of 1688. Yet he could not but observe that it had strengthened a new sort of oppression and a new breed of exploiter.

"With these measures," he wrote, "fell in all that Sett of People, who are called the *Monied Men*: such as had raised vast Sums by Trading with Stocks and Funds, and Lending upon great Interest and Praemiums; whose perpetual Harvest is War, and whose beneficial way of Traffic must very much decline by a Peace."

Swift had, as we shall see, a deep hatred of war, of colonial exploitation, of the depression of agriculture by the money-lender and stock-jobber. He saw (rightly) in the Whigs the Party which stood for all these things: he saw (wrongly) in the Tories the Party which opposed them and stood for what he felt to be the older and saner way of life.

In a sense, Swift's hatred of the new forces was reactionary, but it was neither dishonest nor ignoble. The form which his hatred took was the only one which seemed open to him. A generation, two generations earlier he might have become a Leveller, and the duality of the Leveller outlook, based on a confused antagonism to both feudal and bourgeois exploitation, had much in common with his own. It is interesting, if no more, to find that in one of his letters he refers to Stephen College, "the Protestant Joiner" and a martyr of the Left as "a noble person". And a century later William Godwin, the oracle of the English Jacobins, declared that Swift showed "a more profound insight into the true principles of political justice than any preceding or contemporary author". Swift was born in an evil time when there were neither Levellers nor Jacobins, and in practice if one was not a Whig the only alternative was to be a Tory.

Swift may be reckoned the first in that curious succession of Tory radicals who expressed in a more or less distorted form an opposition to those features of capitalist development which bore most oppressively upon the masses. In the direct succession, Cobbett was perhaps the last and greatest figure; but the line reappears in the nineteenth century, touching the fringes of Chartism in the persons of Oastler, J. R. Stephens and Charles Kingsley. Finally, through Ruskin, this Tory radicalism was not without influence on William Morris and the modern working class movement in Britain.

How far he was from the common Tory beliefs in Divine Right and Non-resistance both his life and his works bear full witness. There is hardly a reference anywhere to any monarch which is not one of derision and contempt and he was never so happily employed as when thwarting the ministers who governed in their name. Nor should we forget how Gulliver, visiting the island of Glubbdubdrib, whose inhabitants had the power to recall the dead, used his opportunities:

"I had the honour to have much conversation with *Brutus*; and was told that his Ancestor *Junius*, *Socrates*, *Epaminondas*, *Cato the Younger*, *Sir Thomas More* and himself were perpetually together: A *Sextumvirate* to which all the Ages of the World cannot add a Seventh. . . . I chiefly fed my eyes with beholding the Destroyers of Tyrants and Usurpers, and the Restorers of Liberty to oppressed and injured Nations. But it

is impossible to express the Satisfaction which I received in my own Mind, after such a Manner as to make it a suitable Entertainment to the Reader."

So if, as we shall see presently, Swift's Brobdingnag was a *Tory* utopia, his Toryism would no more have qualified him for membership of the Carlton Club to-day than it did in his lifetime for the bishopric to which his talents and services certainly entitled him. We have seen how he attacked the Whigs as the war party. In *Gulliver's Travels* the theme of war is approached again and again. Gulliver offers to the King of Brobdingnag the secret of gunpowder, and when this offer is rejected with horror, comments ironically:

"A strange effect of *narrow Principles and short Views!* that a Prince, possessed of every Quality which procures Veneration, Love and Esteem; of strong Parts, great wisdom and profound Learning; endued with admirable Talents for Government, and almost adored by his subjects; should from a *nice unnecessary Scruple*, whereof in *Europe* we can have no Conception, let slip an Opportunity put into his hands, that would have made him absolute Master of the Lives, the Liberties, and the Fortunes of his People."

Few Tories indeed have been burdened with such nice unnecessary Scruples, nor with these to which Gulliver confesses at the end of his voyages, when he considers whether he should not have annexed his discoveries to the English crown:

"To say the Truth, I had conceived a few Scruples with relation to the distributive Justice of Princes upon these Occasions. For Instance, a Crew of Pirates are driven by a Storm they know not whither; at length a Boy discovers Land from the Top-mast; they go on Shore to rob and plunder; they see an harmless People, are entertained with Kindness, they give the Country a new Name, they take formal Possession of it for the King, they set up a rotten Plank or a Stone for a Memorial, they murder two or three Dozen of the Natives, bring away a Couple more by Force for a Sample, return home, and get their Pardon. Here commences a new Dominion, acquired with a Title by *Divine Right*. Ships are sent with the first Opportunity; the Natives driven out or destroyed, their Princes tortured to discover their Gold; a free Licence given to all Acts of Inhumanity and Lust; the Earth reeking with the Blood

of its Inhabitants: And this execrable Crew of Butchers employed in so pious an Expedition, is a *Modern Colony* sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous People."

Swift had every reason to know what he was talking about, since, before this passage was written, a sudden turn of political events had led to his finding himself, from 1714, settled permanently in Ireland, England's oldest and most exploited colony. For a time he was stunned, and the 'English' side of him held him aloof. But Swift, with his passionate hatred of oppression and injustice and his equally passionate desire to dominate his environment, could not long be still. Step by step he was drawn into a struggle in which all the odds were against him, a struggle which in one sense was doomed to failure because he was fighting the battles of the future with the weapons of the past. The struggle ended, for him, in madness and despair, yet he did succeed in blowing up the almost dying fires of Irish nationality into a fresh blaze, and out of that struggle we have today, among other things, those three master-works, *The Drapier's Letters*, *A Modest Proposal* and *Gulliver's Travels*.

*Gulliver's Travels* is not merely Swift's masterpiece. It is the heart and centre of all his work, lying clear across the most fruitful years of his life. Begun in 1714 and not finished till shortly before its publication in 1726, there is good evidence to show that it was seldom far from his thoughts in these years. It was constantly being rewritten and added to, so that it reflects the growth and development of his ideas, his first, second and final thoughts about man and society.

*The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, then, are the utopias of the two greatest writers of the last phase of the English Revolution, twin and complementary utopias whose authors, like their heroes, are the twin and complementary representatives of their age. Their similarities and their differences are alike significant and the next section of this chapter must begin by examining both the similarities and the differences.

## 2. *The Bourgeois Hero Reaches Utopia*

At first it is the similarities which strike us. Both *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe* belong to a new world which is entirely different from that reflected in any previous utopia. In the first place, the element of pure fiction is enormously increased. For



More, Bacon, Harrington, in varying degrees, the fiction was a mere framework, a convenient device for getting their utopia introduced, never intended to carry any real conviction: one can think away the fiction and what is left would stand up well enough. It is impossible to think of *Gulliver's Travels* or *Robinson Crusoe* in this sort of way. Swift, and Defoe still more, produce novels, "present for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them." There is a fundamental difference in approach, in temper and in style. And it is perhaps in their style that the difference is most fully disclosed.

For the first time we have a style which is fully bourgeois, which avoids excess and pays dividends, and this is just as true of the frustrated aristocrat, Swift, as of the optimistic bourgeois, Defoe. Even More, the most vivid and human of the earlier utopians only descends from the general to the particular for special reasons and with an almost apologetic air of deliberately unbending, as in the little episode of the outburst of coughing in which the exact situation of Utopia was for ever lost. But for Swift and Defoe the general is only built up of an infinitude of minute particulars and the particular has now become the normal. By the accumulation of exact detail Defoe convinced us that the probable really happened, Swift forces us to suspend for a time our disbelief in the impossible.

And their imaginary gardens do not contain only real toads, they also contain real people around whom the whole action turns. The individual hero, the full-scale bourgeois man, having transformed England, has now reached the shores of Utopia. The difference is clear from the very title of these books: instead of *Utopia* and *Oceana* we are offered *The Strange and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner, and Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World by Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon and then a Captain of Several Ships*. It is not only what Crusoe and Gulliver see which is important, but what they do, and their Utopias are presented not in the abstract but very much through the eyes of the visitors: further, they are not mere observers but actors and their actions change and modify the Utopias which they describe. It is significant that this development is far more marked in the case of Crusoe than of Gulliver.

At the outset the social background of each is firmly sketched in. Each came from the "middle state" of life, which Crusoe's father "had found by long experience was the best state in the

world, the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanical part of mankind, and not embarrass'd with the pride, luxury, ambition and envy of the upper part of mankind." Each was a younger son. Here we have the classic bourgeois hero who has held the stage of fiction ever since, the young man of respectable family and good parts, who has been given a fair (or, as some would say, an unfair) start and has his way to make in the world. His adventures are the counterpart of those of the knight errant of medieval romances, except that they are undertaken not for their own sake but for some solidly material benefit. Instead of riding through the Enchanted Forest to the Well at the World's End the bourgeois hero sails prosaically by compass and star around a well charted world. However fantastic Gulliver's adventures may turn out to be, he sets out soberly from the Pool of London and it is possible to determine the latitude and longitude of his wildest fantasies with fair accuracy: *Gulliver's Travels* is the first utopia to be equipped with maps, and if *Robinson Crusoe* is not similarly provided it is only because all the places he visited are sufficiently well known to make them unnecessary.

For by 1700 the world was already fairly mapped, was ceasing to be a place of wonder and was becoming a place "where there is a great deal of money made" by capable and self-reliant young men in the middle state of life. And Britain and Holland, the countries of the first victories of the bourgeoisie, led the field in the hunt to ransack the world. It was natural, therefore, that the travel tale should enjoy an immense vogue in both countries, but it was a travel tale that had changed much since the days of Hakluyt. There, the emphasis had been on the conflict with Spain, the sacking of rich cities, and the capture, against fantastic odds, of galleons loaded with gold and silver plate: it was after all but one generation removed from the old romances. But this early exuberance had passed with the other exuberances of the bourgeoisie in its "knight errant stage"; the concern for trade and for trading opportunities, which had always been latent, now came uppermost. Apart from some odd corners the world seemed sufficiently known and Crusoe's object was to use his knowledge to profitable effect.

And here we strike the first, and probably the most important, difference between Defoe and Swift. Both take as 'hero' the new bourgeois man seeking his profits at the ends of the earth; but

where Defoe completely identifies himself with Crusoe, Swift deliberately creates Gulliver as a mask behind which his criticism may be delivered with more telling effect, just as earlier he had done with M.B. the Dublin Drapier. Behind all the similarities there is the most profound difference: Swift and Defoe did, indeed, look at the same world, and each in his own fashion saw it with exceptional clarity, but they looked with different eyes and drew different conclusions. Defoe accepted and rejoiced in his age, its achievements and its order: Swift rejected them with bitterness, with contempt and with horror. So, while *Robinson Crusoe* is a book single-minded almost to the point of naïvety, *Gulliver's Travels* contains a vast and fascinating contradiction between its form and its content, a contradiction without which it could never have become a nursery classic. As Professor H. Davis says:

“We may regard *Gulliver's Travels* as, both in form and shape, wholly the product of the eighteenth century, while being at the same time the most violent satire of its hopes and dreams and a repudiation of much that it most valued.”

Where Crusoe, like Defoe, is the man of his age, the representative of the all-conquering bourgeoisie, Gulliver is the lost and defeated man. The irony of his fate is only underlined by the commonplace clothes in which Swift has chosen to dress him. Crusoe travels because there are never enough worlds for him to conquer, Gulliver in search of a substitute for the lost (and of course largely fictitious) world that the bourgeois revolution has destroyed. Crusoe finds what he is looking for, because it is only the replica of the world from which he sails. Gulliver can never find his vanished world because he must take with him wherever he goes the essence of the real world of which he is the unwilling representative.

There is nothing in *Robinson Crusoe* but its genius to warn the reader that it is not what it claims to be, an authentic work of travel and adventure. Not even the most stupid reader (for I cannot believe the unnamed Irish bishop who according to Swift declared that “the book was full of improbable lies, and for his part he hardly believed a word of it” to be anything but an invention) could make such a mistake about *Gulliver's Travels*. While both derive by way of the travel tale from the romances of chivalry, *Gulliver's Travels* has a second ancestor—the wonder tale, and in it satire and realism, horror, wit and fantasy are

combined in a wholly new way. This element of fantasy is in Swift, and in many though not all of his predecessors, further evidence of a profound sense of social defeat and of a retreat from the reality of the world in which that defeat had been suffered.

Here, however, a distinction must be drawn, since there have been times when fantasy has had quite another character. The fantasy of Rabelais or of Cyrano de Bergerac, both of whose work had elements of a utopian character, both of whom Swift had read and from whom he probably took hints that were developed in *Gulliver's Travels*, (the Academy of Lagado from the Court of Queen Whim, the significance of physical size and the fantasy of inverted logic from de Bergerac's *Voyage to the Moon*) is that of a rising class, exuberant and conscious of its increasing power and using this weapon to ridicule the shams and absurdities of a decaying society. It is there a weapon of the new Humanism against the theory and practice of the Middle Ages. At the same time, the decaying feudal order remained politically powerful, and a strict censorship forced its critics to adopt an Aesopian language without which their criticism would never have been heard. For the same reason, France in the eighteenth century, when the bourgeois revolution was maturing, produced a whole crop of utopias at a time when in England this form had temporarily almost disappeared. Here the bourgeois revolution had been accomplished, and the question of its successor had not been raised. In France, Foigny and Diderot, Mably, Morelly and even Voltaire found the utopian form admirable as a means of attacking established institutions, religious beliefs or even social and sexual customs in a way which would be generally understood without laying themselves open to official reprisals. The same is true of Swift, who could never have ventured to say many of the things he did in a more direct form, and, even as it was, had considerable apprehensions for his own liberty and the safety of his printer's ears.

Cervantes, too, had used fantasy to ridicule the old order, but here a marked difference can be seen. Spain in the early seventeenth century was a country in which the bourgeoisie had failed to take the necessary first steps towards the conquest of power, a country already entering the long decline which has lasted down to our own time. Spain had become the centre of religious and political reaction in Europe, and the old and new orders were involved in an interrelationship in which both were poisoned and

degraded. So that Cervantes, while criticising the old order through the person of Don Quixote, is forced to criticise without a solid basis on which to rest. He criticises, not from the standpoint of a rising, progressive class, but from a subjective idealism, that is sometimes strikingly akin to that of Swift. And, criticising the past, he too finds present and future equally distasteful while driven to despair, he too takes refuge in illusion, magic and fantasy. Don Quixote is a true hero, but a defeated hero the worst tragedy of whose defeat lies in its absurdity. Both in their greatness and in the tragedy of their failure, Cervantes and Swift, Quixote and Gulliver, seem to me to have more in common than is generally realised.

To turn from Cervantes and Rabelais to the immediate English predecessors of *Gulliver's Travels* is to turn from the great to the trivial. Yet some of them have interest as indications of the background from which Swift's work emerged. Most naïve of all, perhaps, is *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, wife of the Royalist General defeated at Marston Moor. Published in 1668 it was probably written earlier when she and her husband shared the exile of Charles II. It is a wholly reactionary utopia, monarchical and anti-scientific, but, like its author, so child-like and having the occasional shrewdness of a child, that it is impossible to judge it over-harshly.

*The Blazing World* is said to be joined to this world by the North Pole. It is visited by the Duchess and so at least can claim the honour of being the first utopia written by a woman and having a heroine as its central figure. For reasons that are never at all clear she quickly becomes Empress. Of its Government, she asks the inhabitants

"why they have so few laws? To which they answered, That many Laws make many Divisions, which most commonly breed Factions and at last break out into open wars. Next she asked, Why they preferred the Monarchical form of Government before any other? They answered, That as it was natural for a body to have one Head, so it was natural for a Body Politick to have but one Governor, and that a Commonwealth, which had many Governors was like a Monster with many Heads. Besides, said they, a Monarchy is a divine form of Government and agrees most with our religion."

This Utopia is inhabited by many kinds of men in animal shape who follow trades and professions adapted to their nature, and the Empress, not one feels without a certain malice, forms them into appropriate Societies:

"The Bear-men were to be her Experimental Philosophers, the Bird-men her Astronomers, the Fly-, Worm- and Fish-men her Natural Philosophers, the Ape-men her Chymists, the Satyrs her Galenical Physicians, the Frog-men her Politicians, the Spider- and Licc-men her Mathematicians, the Jackdaw-, Magpie- and Parrot-men her Orators and Logicians, the Gyants her Architects etc."

Here, just because of its complete simplicity, the role of fantasy as compensation for defeat is seen at its clearest. Margaret Cavendish, in exile, consumed with pride in her and her husband's family, her wealth vanished, contemptuous of the victorious Commonwealth, ridiculed by the raffish, bankrupt Court that surrounded Charles abroad as an eccentric, frumpish blue-stocking, crowned herself Empress of a Never-never World, covered herself with a blaze of diamonds and mocked or exiled all those whom she hated or could not understand. Here, but for the Grace of Genius, goes Jonathan Swift!

Two other utopias need only a few words. Of one, *The History of the Sevarites*, something was said in the last Chapter. It need only be added that the fusion of realism and fantasy, of the travel tale and the wonder tale which is so outstanding in *Gulliver's Travels* is very clearly marked.

The same is true of an earlier work *The Man in the Moon; or a discourse of a Voyage thither by Domingo Gonsales*, written by Bishop Francis Godwin and first published in 1638.<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in Swift's lifetime, it is now most easily to be found, quaintly disguised as the body of a pamphlet called *A View of St Helena*, in the *Harleian Miscellany*. Not only is there the same fusion noted above, but a number of specific similarities which suggest

<sup>1</sup> Of this book Anthony Wood writes: "This book . . . was censured to be as vain as the opinion of *Copernicus*, or the strange discourses of the *Antipodes* when first heard of. Yet since by a more inquisitive search in unravelling those intricacies, men of solid judgments have since found out a way to pick up that which may add a very considerable knowledge and advantage to posterity. Among which Dr. *Wilkins*, sometimes Bishop of *Chester*, composed by hints thence given, (as 'tis thought) a learned piece called *A discovery of a New World in the Moon*" (*Athena Oxoniensis*, 1691).

that Swift was probably familiar with Godwin's work. There is the same insistence on size: Gonsales is a dwarf and most of the inhabitants of the moon giants who despise the stunted, short lived minority:

"Them they account base unworthy creatures, but one degree above brute beasts, and employ in mean and servile offices, calling them bastards, counterfeits or changelings."

In general there is a strong likeness to the classical-heroic outlook of Swift. There are no laws, no theft because no poverty, little disease, no fear of death. It will be seen how much this atmosphere resembles that of the Houyhnhnms. One feature, the ingenious mechanical contrivance by which Gonsales is carried to the moon by wild geese, anticipates somewhat a still later utopia, Paltock's *Peter Wilkins*.

### 3. *Gulliver's Progress*

If *Gulliver's Travels* has a long and complex pedigree, *Robinson Crusoe*, considered as a utopia, has but little.<sup>1</sup> Earlier utopias had been, in one way or another, pictures of a community; something of the social unity and stability which feudal society had inherited from tribal is taken for granted, and the individual, however tenderly his needs may be considered, is still part of a greater whole. Robinson Crusoe is the pure bourgeois man, the man completely alone, and his utopia is a one-man colony where the individual owes everything to his own efforts and is neither helped nor hindered by anyone. It is typical of the bourgeois that he always attributes his wealth to his own work, genuinely ignoring what he does not wish to see, the working class to whose exploitation that wealth is due. The illusion of independence has always been his favourite illusion. In a society whose first law is competition, independence carried to the logical absurdity of absolute solitude cannot be without a certain theoretical appeal, since solitude means first of all freedom from competitors and only secondarily the absence of assistants. This is the basis of the widespread desert island dream, in which the hero is always either alone or king of the island.

Crusoe indeed complains of the lack of company on his island, but in reality he is sufficiently reconciled to his state and presently

<sup>1</sup> But see p. 84 for Nevile's *The Isle of Pines*.

discovers ample compensations. When other inhabitants do arrive he is careful to make sure that they come as servants or tenants. When enough have been collected the final happy state is reached in which the proprietor Crusoe can leave his property to itself, and, withdrawn from the actual labour of production, can collect rent and profit from a distance. The bourgeois utopia, in short, is the foundation of a colony by the free bourgeois man.

Not that this man is without quite admirable qualities. Crusoe, like Defoe, is by eighteenth-century standards humane and even generous. He is singularly devoid of narrow racial or religious prejudices and at all times finds it necessary to satisfy himself that his actions are in accord with the strictest moral principles. Thus he has a long debate with himself as to the lawfulness of massacring the cannibals, and in fact does not do so till good moral grounds offer themselves. In *Further Adventures* he is genuinely distressed at the destruction by his shipmates of a native village in Madagascar, though even here he almost manages to satisfy himself in the end that some justification existed. But in the long run, and this again is where Crusoe stands for the true bourgeois man, he does almost always convince himself that what is profitable is right, just as Defoe was always certain that however dubious some of his actions might appear, they were always reconcilable to "true Revolution principles."

It is I think the unity and simplicity of *Robinson Crusoe*, the unity and simplicity of life as it appeared to a class before whom the future seemed to offer an eternity of success and to whom Heaven's Gate seemed hardly further off than Cathay, which makes it most of all so complete a contrast to *Gulliver's Travels*. And it seems natural enough, therefore, that the former was written in a single burst, almost as an afterthought to a life packed with the most various activities, whereas, as I have already said, *Gulliver's Travels* was the product of Swift's twelve most creative years, constantly revised and expanded and reflecting both the development and the contradictions of his thought during that time. It is now necessary to turn and trace in some detail the chronology of its composition and the changes which it went through.

Written as it was, it is neither a single book nor a single utopia. It is a series of short books strung on the thread of a common central character, and a series of utopias, some positive and some negative. That is to say the social criticism is conveyed in some places by descriptions of a Commonwealth whose merits



Swift holds up as an example to his countrymen but in others by those whose vices and follies constitute a satirical attack upon familiar institutions. More than this, there are parts where both elements are found in conjunction, and in this respect as perhaps in others, Swift seems to have served as a model for Samuel Butler when he came to write his *Erewhon*.

Early in 1714 Swift joined with his friends Arbuthnot, Pope, Gay and Parnell to compile a joint satire, *The Memoirs of Martin Scriblerus*. Swift's contribution seems to have been an account of a voyage to the land of pygmies which grew into the first part of Book I of *Gulliver's Travels*, and the satire on projectors which was later expanded to make a large section of Book III. Then came the death of Queen Anne and Swift's retirement to Dublin: for some years he was stunned into silence by this blow and in these years of silence his genius matured and took a new direction. His hatred of injustice and oppression was intensified by the conspicuous example which he discovered in Ireland.

In 1719 Defoe scored an immense popular success with *Robinson Crusoe*. Swift had no high opinion of Defoe. The fellow was a Whig, a sneaking tradesman and a vulgar ignoramus whose writings were below the notice of the polite wits who filled the literary coffee houses. Defoe might well have answered in the words which Swift wrote about himself:

"As for his works in Verse and Prose,  
I own myself no Judge of those:  
Nor, can I tell what Criticks thought 'em;  
But, this I know, all People bought 'em;"

and we need not enter in to the perhaps inevitable hostility between these two great men. What seems clear, however, is that the success of Defoe's imaginary travel tale turned Swift's mind back to the long neglected manuscript in which he had once begun to exploit this *genre* to so different an end. At any rate, about 1720 he is again at work upon what had now become Gulliver's adventures in Lilliput.

But, whereas the earlier chapters had been a light-hearted satire on the littleness of man and the folly of his delusions of grandeur, a new and bitter note can now be detected. Gulliver himself, who at the beginning of the book had appeared to stand for Swift, has now become Bolingbroke and his disgrace and exile

is an account in cipher of Bolingbroke's fall from power. Much later other additions were made: Walpole is introduced in the character of Flimnap and there are allusions to events as late as the revival of the Order of the Bath (1725) and the award to Walpole of the Order of the Garter (May, 1726). It is clear in general that right up to its publication in 1726 Swift was constantly taking out his manuscript and adding some fresh touch as it came into his mind.

There are, consequently, all sorts of contradictions and incongruities. One such is Chapter VI of the Lilliputian book. The general character of the book is clear: it is a negative utopia, Swift's ironic comment on human littleness, on the absurdity of political pretensions, feuds and honours. Swift stands *above* the English scene and Lilliput is what he sees there. But in Chapter VI, obviously written much later than most of the rest of the book, this giant's eye view is abandoned in favour of a few pages of direct utopian writing very much nearer to the classic manner of More.

In it Swift describes certain laws and customs which "if they were not so directly contrary to those of my own dear country, I should be tempted to say a little in their justification". In Lilliput informers are discouraged, fraud more severely regarded than theft, and virtue rewarded at the same time that anti-social behaviour is punished. No one thinks the management of public affairs a mystery and therefore they regard the honest man of average abilities as the fittest to be entrusted with it. All this is very much in line with Swift's peculiar brand of Toryism, and his account of Lilliputian education is still more characteristic.

Parents, they say, "are the least of all others to be entrusted with the education of their own children" and this is entirely taken over by the State from an early age. The education given is entirely determined, not by the abilities shown by the children but by the social status of their parents. There is one system for the children of the nobility, another for those of the gentry, and so forth.

"Only those destined for trade are put out apprentice at eleven years old, whereas those of persons of quality continue in their exercises till fifteen, which answers to one and twenty with us. . . . The cottagers and labourers keep their children at home, their business being merely to till and cultivate the earth,

and therefore their education is of little consequence to the public."

Here the reactionary side of Swift's philosophy shows itself. He accepts the feudal conception of degree and adopts it as the basis for a static Utopia in which an everlasting golden age can be preserved by the rigid division of society in classes which are almost castes, each with its own duties and rights and across whose boundaries it is impossible to pass. This rigid structure, indeed, is inherent in all the early Utopias whose authors conceived them as completed works of art, finished, perfect and unchanging. Human society, like the universe, was something deliberately created, not something which had evolved dialectically from the development of its own contradictions, and all that was needed for Swift, as for More, was an ideal pattern. It was the contrast between this ideal perfection and the obviously imperfect world, and the impossibility of finding any way of bridging the gap between the two which drove them to despair of humanity.

Meanwhile, at this early stage, Swift is concerned with the problem of size, and to it he returns in the Second Book, written apparently soon after work on *Gulliver's Travels* was resumed, and, to judge from the internal evidence, written very much more in a single burst. Here Gulliver visits Brobdingnag, to whose people he is exactly in the same proportion as the Lilliputians were to him. Brobdingnag is a simple Utopia of abundance, not an ideal commonwealth, as the horrifying account of the beggars shows, not without grossness and imperfections, yet having many of the qualities that Swift most desired. Degree is observed, and we have a land of simple, prosperous, hardworking and hard fisted yeomen, whose wants are amply supplied by native merchants and craftsmen. The nation in arms makes a standing army or any peculiar state machinery superfluous, and government is reduced to a minimum. No law is allowed to exceed in number of words the number of letters contained in their alphabet. A minor feature especially pleasing to Swift was the complete absence of seaports and hence of foreign trade.

The physical size of the Brobdingnagians has as its counterpart the possession of the heroic virtues, so that when their king passes his, and Swift's judgement upon Europe it is expressed in terms of size:

"I cannot but consider the Bulk of your Nation to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth."

Swift's philosophy, as expressed in these first two Books, is that man would pass muster if he were bigger, physically, mentally and morally and that a return to a life of few wants and simple virtue would provide a sufficiency of happiness.

But one great change can already be seen. A large part of Book I was written in England, and the scene is that of English politics. By 1720 Swift had been for six years in Ireland and in the rest of *Gulliver's Travels* it is Ireland which provides the background, an Ireland devastated by two centuries of war and misgovernment. Her people were sharply divided into two nations: the Anglo-Irish upper and middle classes to which Swift belonged and the 'old Irish', the peasants, degraded almost beyond humanity by their sufferings. Ireland at this time was a conquered province, nearer than ever before or since to a complete loss of its sense of nationhood. So when Swift draws a picture of the agricultural prosperity of Brobdingnag it is the contrast with the starving Irish peasantry around him that is in his mind.

And it was in 1720 that Swift published the first of his series of Irish pamphlets, urging the people to develop their native resources and, like the Brobdingnagians, to import nothing from abroad, especially from England. This was followed in 1724 by the more famous *Drapier's Letters* which made Swift a national figure and defeated the project of Wood's Halfpence. But even in his victory Swift passed to a more utter despair. He could win a limited success of this sort, but it could not touch the heart of the problem, the problem of Irish poverty and the misery of the peasant masses. So, in 1729, he wrote in *A Modest Proposal*:

"Therefore let no Man talk to me of other Expedients: Of taxing our Absentees at five shillings a pound: of using neither Cloath nor household Furniture, except what is of our own Growth and Manufacture. . . . Of learning to Love our Country, wherein we differ even from the LAPLANDERS and the Inhabitants of TOPINAMBOO. . . . Of being a little Cautious not to Sell our Country and Consciences for nothing: Of teaching Landlords to have at least one degree of Mercy towards their Tenants. Lastly of putting a Spirit of Honesty, Industry and Skill into our Shopkeepers. . . .

"But as to myself, having been wearied out for many Years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of Success, I fortunately fell upon this Proposal [that the children of the poor should be fattened and sold for the tables of the rich], which as it is wholly new, so it hath something Solid and Real, of no Expence and little Trouble, full in our own Power, and whereby we can incur no Danger in *disobliging England*."

The expedients were vain, idle and visionary because there was no class in Ireland at that time which had the will and the power to act effectively. Swift, too, was growing old and suffering from increasing infirmity. As he looked around him despair deepened into approaching madness, and it was in this mood that the later parts of *Gulliver's Travels* were written.

Book III is the most confused and contradictory part of the whole work because the greatest gap existed between its different elements. It embodies some of the earliest and some of the latest sections. The section dealing with the scientific projectors was mostly written about 1714, though even here a letter from Arbuthnot shows that as late as 1725 he was still making additions. The satire on projectors is in part an attack on Newton and contemporary science, an attack that was not particularly successful because Swift never fully understood what he was attempting to satirise. His attitude is clear from a remark about the Brobdingnagians:

"The Learning of this People is very defective; consisting only in Morality, History, Poetry and Mathematicks; wherein they must be allowed to excell. But, the last of these is wholly applied to what may be useful in Life; to the Improvement of Agriculture and all mechanical Arts; so that among us it would be little esteemed."

Swift did not grasp the effect the scientific advances of his day were to exercise on production methods, though perhaps if he had he would have liked them none the better for that.

Besides the satire on *scientific* projectors, however, there is the satire on *political* projectors, who make statecraft a sacred mystery to befuddle and rob the common people, and I think that if it were possible to disentangle all the details it would be found that most of this was a later addition resulting from his Irish experiences.

The account of the way in which the agriculture of Balnibarbi had been deliberately ruined by the greed and folly of its landlords is closely parallel to what Swift was writing about Irish landlords in the pamphlets of the same period.

And the whole fabric of the flying island, Laputa, and its relation to the mainland below it, is a direct satire on England and Ireland with many references to the battle over Wood's Halfpence, some of which must have been added as late as 1725. Laputa, whose name, derived from the Spanish, means the whore, is inhabited by a completely idle and parasitic ruling class, divorced from all the realities of life and concerned only to suck tribute from their literally subject territory. Essentially, Book III is a negative utopia aimed at the system of colonial exploitation operating from behind a mask of false reason, false science and false enlightenment.

Finally we have the horrifying account of the Struldbrugs, the people doomed to live for ever after the loss of all the capabilities that make life endurable. Swift had always had a horror of such a fate and in this chapter, which Professor Davis suggests may have been the last written of the whole work, he seems to realise that it was indeed closing in upon him. Yet the really remarkable fact about Swift is the way in which his increasing horror and despair deepened his understanding and sharpened his criticism. This is most of all apparent in Book IV, where Gulliver visits the country of the Houyhnhnms, the rational horses. Swift had previously satirised particular abuses and injustices. Now he drives at the very structure of European society and he depicts it with a clarity that only More and Winstanley among his predecessors had attained:

"I was at much Pains to describe to him the Use of *Money*, the Materials it was made of, and the Value of the Metals: that when a *Yahoo* had got a great Store of this precious Substance, he was able to purchase whatever he had a mind to; the finest Cloathing, the noblest Houses, great Tracts of Land, the most costly Meats and Drinks; and have his Choice of the most beautiful Females. Therefore since *Money* alone, was able to perform all these Feats, our *Yahoos* thought, they could never have enough of it to spend or to save, as they found themselves inclined from their natural Bent either to Profusion or Avarice. That, the rich Man enjoyed the Fruit of the poor Man's Labour, and the latter were a Thousand to One in Proportion to the

former. That the bulk of our People was forced to live miserably by labouring every Day for small wages to make a few live plentifully. I enlarged myself much on these and many other Particulars to the same Purpose: but his Honour was still to seek: For he went upon a supposition that all Animals had a Title to their Share in the Productions of the Earth: and especially those who presided over the rest."

This title is simply the Birthright for which the Levellers had contended two generations before, and it was no doubt passages like this, and others in which Law, government, commerce and war are discussed in a similar vein which won the approval of Godwin two generations later.

There is, however, much more here than negative satire. Book IV, like Book II, is a positive utopia, perhaps the strangest ever conceived and one which marks a new turn in Swift's thought. Earlier he had stressed the littleness of man, implying that all might be well if he could attain the stature of which he was capable, for was not man a soul made in the image of God? In Book IV all this is thrown open to doubt. Man, he suggests, is corrupt beyond redemption and nothing can serve but a new species, born without original sin and therefore without need of that salvation which seemed so unaccountably withheld. So he constructs a moral utopia of rational horses, living in a society of Arcadian simplicity which looks back on the one hand to the Golden Age of primitive tribal communism and to the asceticism of More's *Utopia* where happiness is reached by the elimination of all superfluous wants, and forward on the other to the closely related 'noble savage' myth of Diderot and Rousseau and the philosophic forerunners of the French Revolution.

Swift goes indeed far beyond them by returning not only to the noble savage but to a more biologically specialised world. The horse is nobler than man because he is less complex. He has few wants and has attained an extremely advanced moral and philosophical superstructure on an economic basis that is roughly that of the Neolithic Age. The State barely exists, clothes and metals are unknown, the unit of society is the patriarchal family. The Houyhnhnms show neither the refinements nor the vices of the civilisation which Swift had come to detest.

In other respects they compare badly with the happy, uninhibited and affectionate savages of, for example, Diderot's

*Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage.* In shedding human vices and follies they have lost also human warmth and passion: good becomes empty of meaning to beings incapable of evil. They marry, beget children, are educated and regulate all their social relations by the coldest reason. It is a world which we can admire from a distance but in which only Swift would care to live.

To point the contrast to this coldly perfect polity of horses, men are represented by the Yahoos, more odious and disgusting than any other animals because they excel them in cunning and, without human reason, possess all the vices of humanity. To a limited extent the Yahoos stand for men as Swift saw them in his moments of utter despair. Yet, as Sir Charles Firth has shown in his brilliant essay *The Political Significance of Gulliver's Travels*, this is only one side of the medal. We must never forget that Swift wrote in devastated Ireland, and we have seen how the specific character of his despair arose from the total contradiction between his vision of social justice and the existing relation of social forces. Above all, he despaired of any possibility of improving the lot of the peasantry, of remedying:

"The millions of oppressions they lie under, the tyranny of their landlords, the ridiculous zeal of their priests and the general misery of the whole nation."

Swift feared that these "millions of oppressions" were transforming the Irish into a nation of Yahoos. As Firth puts it;

"'The savage old Irish' who made up 'the poorer sort of our natives', were not only in a position similar to that of the Yahoos, but there was also a certain similarity in their natures. If nothing was done to stop the process of degeneration they would become complete brutes, as the Yahoos were already. They were, so to speak, Yahoos in the making."

The Yahoos, then, were less a picture of man than a warning of what Swift feared. He is continuing the attack on colonialism begun in Book III by pointing out what he regards as its inevitable consequence. What he did not see, and was indeed prevented by his whole class background and standpoint from seeing, was that these same peasants were already beginning their long and bitter agrarian struggle, which allied to the struggle for national independence which Swift had helped to forward, was to enable



them to rescue themselves from their degradation. The *Modest Proposal* was not in the end to prove history's last word on the Irish question.

Swift's misanthropy has become almost proverbial, and is deduced mainly from the Yahoos and *A Modest Proposal*. Yet this view can only be maintained by a superficial reading: the bitterness is not that of a man with a low estimate of human dignity and the value of human happiness but of one who found his high estimate of man's place in the universe perpetually contradicted by everything around him. The victory of the bourgeois over the feudal order was it is true socially progressive, but bourgeois progress has always been achieved at a staggering cost in human suffering and degradation. Swift, looking back to an idealised past and forward to a just society which few beside him cared even to guess at, saw only the cost. Defoe saw only the social advance, barely noticing the suffering which accompanied it. Together, in their two complementary utopias, they depicted the glory and misery of their age. Defoe's benevolence is that of the victor who can afford to be magnanimous. Swift's misanthropy is that of the representative of a defeated class, yet, though he fought against bourgeois values in the name of the past, the very fact that he fought against them honestly and courageously held within it the ground for a new standpoint in which the future could be comprehended. That, I believe, is why we honour Swift while we can only respect Defoe.

#### 4. *Berington and Paltock*

For reasons already indicated utopian literature reached its lowest level in England during the eighteenth century, and the successors to *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* do not call for any detailed treatment. Two works, however, should be mentioned: *The Memoirs of Signor Gaudenzio di Lucca* by Simon Berington and *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins* by Robert Paltock.

The first, a rather academic production, once attributed for no very good reason to Bishop Berkeley, was published in 1738. It purports to be:

"Taken from his Confession and Examination before the Fathers of the Inquisition at Bologna in Italy. Making a discovery of an unknown Country in the midst of the vast Deserts of Africa, as Ancient, Populous, and Civilised as the Chinese."

It may well reflect early reports of the advanced native civilisations existing in the Upper Niger region, and, in so far as the travel tale element is fairly prominent, it may be regarded as being in the tradition of *Robinson Crusoe*. So far as matter is concerned, however, the author has clearly studied earlier utopian writers, especially More and Campanella, and has little of his own to add of any value.

The Mezzorarrrians, as these people call themselves, were driven from Egypt by a barbarian invasion, and, having crossed the Sahara, settled in an unknown region of great natural fertility. This point is especially insisted on as affording the basis of a social order in which elements of primitive and modern communism are oddly blended: on the one hand their society is simple and tribal, on the other it is made clear that owing to their great natural resources, their communism is based on abundance rather than scarcity. This is the most original feature of the utopia, though it leads inevitably to certain contradictions. Berington defends his system very much in the style of More:

“Since every one of them is employed for the common good more than for themselves, perhaps Persons may apprehend that this gives a Check to Industry, not having that spur to private Interest, hoarding up riches or aggrandising their Families, as is to be found in other Nations. I was apprehensive of this myself, when I came to understand their Government; but so far from it, that probably there is not such an Industrious Race of People in the Universe.”

Almost the only feature which seems specially characteristic of the eighteenth century is their religion. They are apparently Deists, tolerant, benevolent and eminently rational.

“Everything they do is a sort of Paradox to us, for they are the freest and yet the strictest People in the World: the whole Nation . . . being more like an Universal Regular College or Community [it must be remembered that the narrator is described as an Italian Catholic] than anything else.”

This toleration produces a moment of rather grim humour when Signor Gaudentio is being examined by the Inquisition. He says that the Mezzorarrrians—

"Told me when I came to be better acquainted with them, I should find they were not so inhuman as to put People to Death because they were of a different Opinion from their own."

The Inquisitor asks sourly:

"I hope you don't think it unlawful to persecute, or even put to Death obstinate Hereticks who would destroy the Religion of our Forefathers and lead others into the same Damnation with themselves?"

and Gaudentio very hastily disclaims the holding of any such dangerous opinion.

*The Adventures of Peter Wilkins*, who discovers a nation of flying Indians in the South Seas, has a little of the fantastic quality of *Gulliver's Travels* on a very much lower level, but its underlying character is far more close to that of *Robinson Crusoe*. Its hybrid character and stiffly mechanical development prevent it from coming anywhere near either of its predecessors in quality. Peter Wilkins is, however, like Robinson Crusoe, very much the typical bourgeois hero at a rather later stage. Written in 1751, at the time when the Industrial Revolution was just taking shape, the book shows a far greater preoccupation with the details of production technique than any previous utopian romance.

After a series of adventures very much in the Crusoe style, including an escape from Africa and a period alone on a desert island, Peter Wilkins falls in with the Flying Indians. They have a stone age culture, with no knowledge of letters, metal or the measurement of time, yet most inconsistently, a fully developed feudal social organisation and a grandiose architecture. Wilkins instantly impresses them with his "superior knowledge" and cleverness. This does not consist in any personal quality that he possesses: he is in fact an exceptionally stupid young man whose principal talent seems to be the capacity to father an immense family in record time. His superiority is entirely that of the bourgeois man in a feudal society, which more than compensates for his inability to fly.

At his first meeting he displays his knowledge of gunpowder and firearms: it will be seen that he has none of Swift's scruples and is, indeed, as morally obtuse as an American politician brandishing an atom bomb. By this and similar demonstrations he quickly gains a complete ascendancy which he uses to inaugu-

rate a full-blown bourgeois revolution from within. He introduces writing, the metallurgical arts, all sorts of mechanical techniques. Slavery and serfdom are abolished and replaced by a system of 'free' wage labour in which the former feudal grandees find themselves employing their former slaves as producers of commodities. An era of universal plenty and prosperity for all is promised:

"Sir," says I, "the man who has nothing to hope loses the use of one of his faculties; and if I guess right, and you live ten years longer, you shall see this State as much altered as the difference between a lask (slave) and the tree he feeds on. You shall all be possessed of that which will bring you fruits from the woods without a lask to fetch it. Those who were before your slaves shall take it as an honour to be employed by you, and at the same time shall employ others dependent on them, so as the great and small shall be under mutual obligations to each other, and both to the truly industrious artificer: and yet every one content only with what he merits."

"Dear son," says my father [father-in-law], "those will be glorious days indeed!"

Glorious days indeed! By its very simplicity this book marks a turning point. It is both the first utopia in which we can see the forces of change at work and the last which discovers in the bourgeois order the road to Utopia. At the time of its composition the Bourgeois Revolution had prepared the way for large scale capitalist production, which in turn created a new class and contradictions which could only be resolved by the supercession of bourgeois society. All future utopias reflect, in one way or another, the contradiction and conflict within the new society.

## CHAPTER V

### REASON IN REVOLT

I have lived to see thirty millions of people indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice, their king led in triumph and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects. And now methinks I see the ardour of liberty catching and spreading, a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and science.

DR. PRICE: A Sermon preached before the Society for  
Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain, 1789.

In England the machines are like men and the men like machines.

HEINE.

#### 1. *Political Justice*

BETWEEN Dr. Price's sermon and Heine's observation lies a decisive phase in the development of capitalism and a whole world of extravagant hopes and correspondingly unbounded despairs. The French Revolution was to free men from political tyranny and usher in an age when the exercise of reason would open the road to Utopia. The machine was to increase national prosperity boundlessly and free men from the curse laid upon Adam at the Fall, from the iron law that decreed that however long and hard they worked they could produce little more than was needed to keep them alive. In 1789 the burden seemed about to be lifted from the shoulder and it was felt that nothing was required of man but to straighten his back and march straight into an earthly paradise.

Such expectations were not new, least of all in England. We have already seen something like them in the seventeenth century, when the English Revolution seemed to be a preliminary to the Millennium,<sup>1</sup> but there were important new features in 1789 which have to be taken into account. The English Revolution in the seventeenth century was an isolated event: nothing at all comparable had happened elsewhere except in the Netherlands, nor was there any apparent likelihood of its repetition elsewhere. In Europe it was nowhere understood nor regarded as an example to

<sup>1</sup> See p. 67.

be followed. But the French Revolution did rouse Europe: France was the acknowledged cultural leader, French literature an unrivalled model, and the philosophers of the enlightenment, who prepared the ground for the Revolution, had been read and admired all over the Continent. Feudal reaction was felt to be outmoded and a growing bourgeoisie was eager to follow the French example. It was only in England, where the dominant section of the bourgeoisie, having accomplished their revolution, had come to terms with a now largely bourgeois aristocracy, that the Revolution was unwelcome. In England a further revolution could only be of a dangerously popular character which would threaten the existing compromise. Here, too, the lesson of the Commonwealth was not quite forgotten, and *Leveller* was in current use as a synonym for *Radical* as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, while Democrat was a title only adopted by the lower orders. On the Continent, then, the Revolution was welcomed by all sections of the middle and lower classes, in England only by those who thought the work of the seventeenth century was still incomplete. But everywhere it was recognised as an event of not merely French but of international significance.

It came, too, and indeed would not have been possible otherwise, after a long period of expansion. The main outlines of the world were now securely mapped and a series of colonial wars had established French, British, Spanish and Dutch colonial empires on a world scale. In America the revolt of the colonists had just ended by the establishment in the United States of the first bourgeois republic. Alongside the growth of world trade and exploration was a corresponding growth of the productive forces, most marked in England, where, by 1789, what we now call the Industrial Revolution was already making rapid headway, but marked enough elsewhere for the bourgeoisie to be acquiring a sense of strength frustrated by the bonds of a degenerate feudalism. Economic grievances of a kind which, though present, remained in the background of the English Revolution, or only came to the front at a later stage, were stressed from the beginning in the *Cabiers de Doléances*, the statements of demands which preceded the meeting of the States General.

For these and other reasons the French Revolution was more avowedly political, more unmistakably a class struggle, than any that had gone before. The Revolution in England had worn a mask of religion: in Holland and America there was the element of

national liberation to confuse both contemporaries and the historian. So persistent and so convenient has been this fog that it is only now beginning to clear and the Marxist view that all these were bourgeois revolutions to win acceptance. In the case of France such confusion is less possible. The French Revolution appeared from the start as a struggle of the bourgeoisie, with the peasants and the unpropertied masses of the towns as their allies, against a feudal régime. It was the spectre of the class struggle that terrified all sections of the propertied in England. The words "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" meant quite different things to those who used and to those who heard them. For the first, Equality meant the abolition of those feudal restrictions which gave special privileges to a few, and Liberty the abolition of everything which hindered the free accumulation of capital; for the latter, they meant security and equality of condition. The time quickly came when they demanded that their interpretation should prevail.

If the hopes and speculations of the time can be summed up in a single word that word is *Reason*. To the bar of Reason everything was brought: kingship, religion, laws, customs and beliefs—whatever could not account rationally for itself was unhesitatingly condemned. In Reason was the key to Utopia, for if only the ideal society could be discovered and clearly demonstrated to be reasonable no-one could seriously oppose it. "Truth", wrote Blake, "can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ'd." A standpoint that 150 years earlier had been peculiar to a few individuals like Hartlib now became the universal dogma. That Reason itself had to be examined, that while, for example, it has seemed reasonable to the capitalist that all men should be free to exploit or be exploited, this was by no means so clear to the worker, was something still to be understood. It has taken us another 150 years to learn that Reason itself has a class basis.

At this point all that seemed necessary was to sweep away certain negative restraints—monarchy, priestcraft, ignorance—by which men were coerced or deluded into denying Reason. Once this was done the rest followed easily. The doctrine of human perfectability might be absurd enough in some of the forms it took, yet it contained the fundamental truth that human nature is not something absolute and unchanging but is itself the product of human life and the actual conditions under which that life is carried on. An unending prospect opened out, and here,

I think, is the new feature that marks the utopian speculation of this age. Earlier utopias conceived a perfect commonwealth finished in all its parts and therefore eternally fixed. Now, progress was not merely the road to Utopia, it existed within Utopia, which, instead of having a geography, now has a history and a climate. It is not surprising that the two great utopian writers of the age are two of its greatest poets, Blake and Shelley.

First, however, something must be said about an extremely prosaic figure, William Godwin, whose principal work, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* though not strictly a utopia in the sense in which I have defined it for the purpose of this book, cannot be passed over. Not only was its influence immense, but it does concentrate all the typical ideas of the time into a single work permeated with utopian feeling. So representative was it that for years after its publication the phrase *the Modern Philosophy* was always taken as referring to Godwin and his followers.

Undoubtedly the French Revolution supplied the impetus for Godwin's thought, yet he disliked and distrusted all revolutions, preferring to rely on a vaguely formulated desire for change, which, he supposed, would be produced by the propagation of his ideas. Here we encounter the basic contradiction: man is moulded by his environment, that is, mainly, by the society in which he lives. But society can only be changed by man, and how is this unchanged man to change society or even to imagine or desire such a change? It is one of those familiar chicken and egg paradoxes which are in fact insoluble in terms of mechanical materialism. Only when seen dialectically is the contradiction resolved, when we look not at man as an individual in isolation but at man as a member of a class, and see that it is in the conflict of classes that both man and society are transformed. This Godwin never understood, and his thought is in consequence academic and harmless. This no doubt is why he was never interfered with during the whole period of the anti-Jacobin terror. There is much in his work that is courageous and clear-headed, but the total effect is negative.

Just as he did not believe in revolution as a means of reaching Utopia, he saw Utopia itself mainly as an absence of the things he disliked. Government was to be reduced to a minimum, society to consist of a loose federation of semi-autonomous communes. This was indeed a feature of many of the utopian writers of this and the succeeding period. Owen's parallelograms, Fourier's



phalanxes and Spence's parishes all illustrate the tendency, which can even be traced back to Winstanley the Digger. All these utopias spring in some part from the disillusion of the masses at the progress and outcome of the bourgeois revolution, and one of the features of that revolution is the expropriation of the peasantry and the destruction of the feudal village commune. The parish or commune ceases to be the frame inside which the producer functions: he is herded into towns and factories, away from his "known and accustomed houses". The first effects of the division of labour are hideously apparent. So the utopian writers voice the dream of a village commune restored on a higher plane, without the presence of a frequently tyrannical feudal master, and making use of the new technical and scientific knowledge to secure a standard of living impossible in the Middle Ages. Closely connected with this is the tendency, new at this time, with the significant exception of the Diggers, to transfer utopian fantasy into brick and mortar utopian colonies.

Within the parish, Godwin argued, little more would be needed than the force of public opinion which would condemn all anti-social acts as offences against reason. If wars were unavoidable the armed nation would make a professional army unnecessary: here he is in line with all the radical opinion of the time. Freedom meant only the absence of any restraint upon the individual, the assumption being that the individual would always wish to do what was reasonable and therefore in the public interest. This general principle lies behind Godwin's very sketchy economic proposals. All men ought to be equal, none ought to enjoy a superfluity while others were in want. Yet equally it is an offence against the idea of liberty to enforce equality or to deprive anyone of his property. Property must remain sacred in order that men may exercise reason in disposing of it. That there is a difference in kind between the wealth a man himself creates and that which he acquires by exploiting the labour of others is outside Godwin's conception: it is reason and virtue which interest him, not the mode of production.

Here his philosophic anarchism is seen at its wildest: "Everything understood by the term co-operation is in some sense an evil," because all co-operation means a certain surrender of individual freedom. Godwin suggested that it might become unnecessary by the increased use of machinery, but how the production and employment of vast quantities of complicated

machinery was possible without co-operation is never explained.

For Godwin and for those who based their ideas upon his philosophy, there had to be something of the miracle about change, however fervently they might deny the possibility of the miraculous. This is true above all of Godwin's son-in-law, Shelley, whose whole writings with their "Kingless continents sinless as Eden" are utopian from beginning to end. He, too, was confronted by this contradiction between man and environment and he solved it by transferring it to a superhuman plane. Man's struggles and conflicts were the reflection on earth of a cosmic struggle between the principles of Good and Evil, in which Evil had so far had the better of things but in which Good would ultimately triumph. This Manichean philosophy can become an expression of negation and despair but it is not necessarily so. For it does at least recognise the conflict, and it may, as it did with Shelley, admit the possibility of human co-operation with one side or the other. For him the great question, unresolved at the time of his death, was of the form of this co-operation. Generally, as in *Prometheus Unbound* or *The Masque of Anarchy*, man's part seems to be a heroic endurance of evil in the course of which both man and the universe are transformed:

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory!"

By this endurance man can free himself from the

"Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes  
Of reasoned wrong."

To reach Utopia in which

"The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains  
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself; just, gentle, wise."

Elsewhere there are signs that Shelley was moving towards a more positive attitude: if he had lived longer we cannot doubt that he would have identified himself more closely with the actual struggles then developing. There is one other aspect of *Prometheus Unbound* which demands comment here. The 'crime' of Prometheus was that of breaking the age-long impasse of primitive communism by introducing changes into the mode of production. Primitive communism might be, as the ancient myths presented it, a Golden Age, but it had to be left behind before any progress was possible. What Prometheus did was to place in man's hands a choice, the possibility of advance from the realm of necessity to that of freedom. Here is at least the germ of a dialectic approach to history. Like most of his generation Shelley had no doubts as to the value of science or machinery: such doubts were still confined to those who suffered from their effects.

Another method of escape from the Godwinian dilemma was that considered by Coleridge and Southey. Suppose that a new environment could be created artificially on a small scale, in which a few individuals might be transformed, could not these in turn react upon the world at large and so effect, in time, a universal change? Thus was born the scheme for a Pantisocracy, the first, perhaps, of all the attempts to realise Utopia as a model commonwealth. America, where a revolution had just been successful, was then a magnet for all radicals, a land of freedom and justice whose defects (which Cobbett and Paine were to discover) were hardly visible to the eye of faith on the other side of the Atlantic. Here was land for the taking, and no kings, priests or feudal lords to prevent the attainment of perfection. So the Pantisocrats planned their settlement on the banks of the Susquehanna and Southey wrote to his brother in 1794:

"We preached Pantisocracy and Aspheterism everywhere. These, Tom, are two new words, the first signifying the equal government of all, and the other the generalisation of individual property."

The scheme foundered, partly because of Southey's already ingrained tendency to rat, but mainly for the reason which has made all such "pocket editions of the New Jerusalem" at the worst fiascos and at the best curiosities. Before such a community could be established a considerable amount of capital had to be collected—and the owners of capital have seldom been interested

in Utopia. Utopian colonies have usually been abortive because the necessary capital could not be found or have failed to prosper because they have had to start with a capital hopelessly inadequate. In this case, the modest proposed capital of £125 a head turned out to be quite unprocurable.

In reality, the scheme was an attempt to avoid rather than to solve the dilemma. Pantisocracy, like all attempts to found a model commonwealth, was largely the result of an impulse of flight, not only from immediate repression, but from the need to fight in the world as it is and to transform it. There is always an element of self-deceit in the belief that eventually the utopians will return to transform the world from the outside. The decision to retreat to the Susquehanna was the first step on the road that ended for Coleridge in a morass of admittedly excellent table talk and for Southey with the Poet Laureateship and a place on the staff of the *Quarterly Review*.

Like so many radical writers of this time Coleridge shared with Blake the heritage of dissenting humanism. The great difference between them was that Blake, unlike Coleridge, was apprenticed to a manual trade and followed it all his life. It is this that gives his thought an actuality unusual in English poetry. In the so-called Prophetic Books, which, as will be seen, are utopian from end to end, symbol is piled upon symbol, mythical figures divide and unite till the mind refuses to follow their mutations, but at their wildest these Books have an earthiness which derives from the actual conditions of life in Blake's time. And the man who, having spent a lifetime compiling a vast series of such Prophetic Books could write:

"Prophets in the modern sense of the word have never existed. . . . Every honest man is a Prophet; he utters his opinion both of private & public matters. Thus: If you go on So, the result is So. He never says, such a thing will happen, let you do what you will"

was clearly no crazy visionary.

Blake's father, a Swedenborgian hosier of London, apprenticed his son to a leading engraver, and Blake is one of the great English masters of the craft of engraving on metal. When the French Revolution broke out he was just thirty but had not yet written any of his important poems. The Revolution influenced him profoundly. In 1789 appeared the first of a series of rhapsodic

poems with such titles as *The French Revolution*, *A Song of Liberty*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *America* and *Europe*. In all these, though they are written in Blake's peculiar symbolic manner, the basic ideas are those of the radical circle in which he moved, a circle in which Paine rather than Godwin was the dominating influence. There is a simple delight in the overthrow of tyranny and a belief in the opening of a new age for France and the world, there is also, especially in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a dialectic unique at this date.

Soon, however, three things happened. First, there was the bitter repression that broke up the London Corresponding Society, drove Paine into exile and made the open expression of radical views near to impossible for twenty years. On the title page of a book attacking Paine, Blake wrote:

"To defend the Bible in this year of 1798 would cost a man his life. The Beast and the Whore rule without control."

In this atmosphere of repression and censorship Blake went underground, his writing becoming progressively vaguer, his myths continually more involved.

But it was not only the censorship which oppressed him. The French Revolution followed its course, with the big bourgeoisie more and more firmly in control behind a military dictatorship. After Thermidor the Republic degenerated into the Directory, the Directory into the Empire. It was no longer possible to see the clear issue between freedom and tyranny, the bright hopes of 1789 were evidently not being fulfilled. Blake, like many more, turned away from politics in the narrow sense, not losing faith but seeing that the struggle was of a different and far more complicated character than he had once supposed. So, in 1809, he writes:

"I am really sorry to see my Countrymen trouble themselves about politics. . . . Princes appear to me to be fools. Houses of Commons & Houses of Lords appear to me to be fools; they seem to me to be something Else besides Human Life."

The third thing was happening in England. Here, under the stimulus of war, capitalism was advancing at an unprecedented pace. The last peasantry were being expropriated by the Enclosures, the long death of the hand workers was beginning, everywhere sprang up the Satanic Mills. Oppression was changing its face, and Blake was one of the first to recognise a new enemy.

Paraphrasing Milton he might have said that new capitalist was but old baron writ large. And the priest of the old school, preaching hell fire was but a child to Parson Malthus, the bastard science of whose 'principle of population' seemed to doom the vast majority of the human race to perpetual and perpetually increasing misery. It is the sense of these new events that makes Blake's later poetry unique.

First, he turned his dialectic upon the mechanical materialism which he recognised as the doctrine of capitalism in this phase. Godwin, like most other people, still saw and thought in terms of the sovereign individual, without ties and without environment, a view which is the social counterpart of eighteenth century mechanical atomism. Blake hated and attacked this atomism for exactly the same reason as he attacked the fashionable engravers who reduced everything to "Unorganised Blots and Blurs", to "dots and lozenges", and himself insisted on the primacy of line. In defending line Blake was implicitly defending the belief that the part cannot exist except in relation to the whole, the individual except in relation to the class of which he is a member.<sup>1</sup>

It is in this context that Blake's attitude to Locke, Newton and Voltaire, to all the thinkers of the enlightenment, must be understood. He condemned them not because they were rational but because they were mechanical, yet he saw in their mechanical materialism something which, while it was being used to enslave humanity, had within itself also a potentially liberating force:

"Mock on, Mock on Voltaire, Rousseau:  
Mock on, Mock on: 'tis all in vain!  
You throw the sand against the wind,  
And the wind blows it back again.

"And every sand becomes a Gem  
Reflected in the beams divine;  
Blown back they blind the mocking Eye,  
But still in Israel's paths they shine.

"The Atoms of Democritus  
And Newton's Particles of light  
Are sands upon the Red sea shore,  
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright."

<sup>1</sup> Compare Morris: "Remember always, form before colour and outline, silhouette before modelling, not because these are of less importance, but because they can't be right if the first are wrong."

Satanic wheels, man destroying Jerusalem and building Babylon—this for Blake is the fruit of reason uncontrolled, the reason which placed *laissez faire* upon its altar and proclaimed the right of every (rich) man to do what he would with his own. Jerusalem, the dominating symbol of all the later Prophetic Books is Blake's Utopia. Albion—England or the world or man himself—is in a state of perpetual transformation: corresponding to every part of it there is a utopian reality:

“The fields from Islington to Marylebone,  
To Primrose Hill and Saint John's Wood,  
Were builded over with pillars of gold,  
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood.”

Albion *could* become Jerusalem, but it could also become Babylon, the wilderness of squalor and exploitation which he saw the rulers of England creating around him. Man had to choose what he would create, and so the world of these Prophetic Books is not only a world of continual building but a world of continual war.

Thus it is obviously impossible to give the kind of picture of Blake's Utopia that can be given of More's or Harrington's. It is not an island to be discovered or a kingdom to be given laws, but a city—Jerusalem or Golgonooza—to be built. And, unlike previous Utopias, this is not established for ever after a divine or human pattern of perfection. Each building becomes the starting point for a new fall and division and the foundation of a new city. Because Blake is incapable of thinking otherwise than dialectically, history, and therefore Utopia, can never come to a conclusion.

So, for the first time, we have a Utopia reached not by abstract speculation but by the transformation through struggle of what actually exists. This is shown most clearly in the complex interaction of Blake's symbolic figures. The building of Jerusalem, the confounding of Babylon, is the outcome of the eternal yet ever shifting conflict between Urizen-Jehovah, the creator and oppressor, the god of things as they are, and Orc, a Promethean figure, redeemer and regenerator, who elsewhere stands for fire and for revolutionary terror. Blake sees the conflict as fought simultaneously on a number of planes, as a conflict of cosmic forces, but no less as a conflict in society and in the minds of men. Yet this is not a mechanical clash of right and wrong. It is a dialectical interpenetration, a conflict of iron (Urizen represents the 'iron law of wages', Malthus' 'principle of population,' the

new iron machinery of factory production) and fire. Orc is consumer as well as liberator, and Los, another Promethean fire symbol, stands elsewhere for metallurgy, the new transforming technique of the age, in which fire and iron are creatively brought together. Jerusalem is to be the outcome of Orc's struggle, but precisely of Orc's struggle to transform Urizen, who represents the material world as well as its creator: iron is none the less iron because it becomes molten.

And yet, for all the hundreds of pages in which this theme is elaborated, Jerusalem remains an abstraction, veiled in a fog of words. Blake was faced with a problem he could never solve. The new world of smoke and wheels and misery, which it is his peculiar importance to have been the first to grasp imaginatively as a whole, left him bewildered and hopeless. In this, as in other respects, his special position as a free craftsman was both his strength and his weakness. He saw that there *must* be a solution but too few terms of the equation were given for him to be able to find it, so all the Prophetic Books are full of confused battles that never come to a climax and of the building of fabulous cities only that they may be destroyed. In one sense this is because Blake knew that history never ends: but in another because he could not clearly see the next step. Like Shelley, he was a great utopian whose utopia never quite managed to get itself written.

This section must conclude with some account of another dissenting radical, contemporary with Blake and the creator of a Utopia of a much more familiar pattern. Thomas Spence was born in Newcastle in 1750 of poor Scottish parents who were Glassites, members of a sect which advocated a community of goods. At the age of twenty-five Spence became notorious through a paper read before the Newcastle Philosophical Society on the parochial ownership of land, henceforth to be the main point in his political programme. He was expelled from the Society, was victimised and left Newcastle for London, where he lived as a teacher, lecturer and radical book-seller. Like many tradesmen of the time he coined tokens for small change: unlike most of them his tokens often had a sharp political point. One, depicting a man hanging from a gallows, has the inscription: "The End of Pitt."

Holding views of a definitely socialist kind, which, unlike many early socialists, he did all he could to present to the working class, it is not surprising that he was persecuted by the authorities, being imprisoned in 1793 and again in 1794, 1798 and 1801. For



a long time his views made little headway, but shortly before his death (1814) the Society of Spencean Philanthropists was formed, which had a short period of political importance in connection with the Spa Field Riots (1816) and the Cato Street Conspiracy (1820).

Spence's utopia is an exposition in fictional form of his land ownership scheme, not unlike that afterwards put forward by Henry George in *Progress and Poverty*. It was published in two parts. *Description of Spensonia by Thomas Spence Bookseller at the Hive of Liberty*, 8, Little Turnstile High Holborn London, appeared in 1795. It was followed in 1801 by *The Constitution of Spensonia, A Country in Fairyland situated between Utopia and Oceana*. This part adds little of importance to the account in the earlier volume.

Here we are told of a man who, dying, left a ship to his sons to be held in common. Each was to be paid a wage according to his status in the crew, but after this all the profits were to be divided equally. The plan worked excellently, and, when in due time the ship was wrecked on an uninhabited island, the same principle was adopted. The new country was known as the Republic of Spensonia. All land was declared public property and all citizens received shares for which they paid a rent to the community, no other taxation being levied. Houses and workshops were built at public expense. The parish was the unit of social and economic life, but a national assembly, whose meetings needed to be but short and informal,

"takes care of their national concerns and defrays the expenses of the state, and matters of common utility, by a pound rate from each parish, without any other tax."

Further details are given in the form of a dialogue with a visitor to Spensonia. The liberties of the citizens are guaranteed by two very characteristic 'guardian angels'. A secret ballot (the idea of which Spence seems to have taken from Harrington) makes bribery or corruption impossible. The other 'guardian angel' is "the universal Use of Arms, guarantee of a free people." This had long been a standing radical demand: we have seen that it was a feature of More's *Utopia* and that Swift condemned the use of a standing army as a means of enslaving a people. More recently the demand had reappeared in Godwin's *Political Justice*, and it was part of the programme of the London Corresponding Society of which Spence was a member.

In general, the state was of little importance compared with the parish:

"The parishes build and repair houses, make roads, plant hedges and trees, and in a word do all the business of a landlord. And you have seen what sort of landlords they are. I suppose you do not meet with much to repair or improve. And it is no wonder, for a parish has many heads to contrive what ought to be done. Instead of debating about mending the State, as with you: (for ours needs no mending) we employ our ingenuity nearer home, and the result of our debates are in each parish, how we shall work such a mine, drain such a fen or improve such a waste. These things we are all immediately interested in, and have each a vote in executing; and thus we all are not mere spectators in the world, but as all men ought to be, actors, and that only for our own benefit."

A passage like this looks backward to the medieval commune and forward to the withering away of the state. Spence was not an inspired writer, and Spensonia cannot be placed very high in the utopian hierarchy, but at its best it has an honesty and freshness, an atmosphere of neighbourliness, which gives the reader a feeling of real people at work in real clay which is by no means common, and which we shall not encounter again before we reach Morris' *News from Nowhere*.

## 2. *The Utopian Socialists*

The French Revolution considered as a *bourgeois* revolution was an outstanding success, but to those who hailed it as the beginning of an epoch of universal brotherhood it was for that very reason disappointing, and some of them began to grasp this connection, as we have seen Blake doing. Long before, isolated philosophers of the enlightenment had attacked private property as the root of social evils, but such attacks had been regarded as an academic quirk. It was the positive work of the group of men whom we now call the utopian socialists to analyse the failure of the French Revolution to inaugurate the millennium, and to propose solutions based on a new and more deep reaching criticism of society. Engels admirably describes their starting point in his *Anti-Dühring*:

"We saw in the introduction how the French philosophers of the eighteenth century, who paved the way for the revolution, appealed to reason as the sole judge of all that existed. A rational state, a rational society were to be established; everything that ran counter to eternal reason was to be relentlessly set aside. We saw also that in reality this eternal reason was no more than the idealised intellect of the middle class, just at that period developing into the bourgeoisie. When, therefore, the French Revolution had realised this rational society and this rational state, it became apparent that the new institutions, however rational in comparison with earlier conditions, were by no means absolutely rational. The rational state had suffered shipwreck. . . .

"The promised eternal peace had changed into an endless war of conquest. The antagonism between rich and poor, instead of being resolved in general well-being, had been sharpened by the abolition of guild and other privileges, which had bridged it over, and of the benevolent institutions of the church, which had mitigated its effects; the impetuous growth of industry on a capitalist basis raised the poverty and suffering of the working masses into a vital condition of society's existence. . . .

"Trade developed more and more into swindling. The 'fraternity' of the revolutionary motto was realised in the envy and chicanery of the competitive struggle. Corruption took the place of violent oppression, and money replaced the sword as the chief lever of social power. . . .

"In a word, compared with the glowing promises of the Enlightenment, the social and political institutions established by the 'victory of reason' proved to be bitterly disillusioning caricatures. The only thing lacking was people to voice this disillusionment, and these came with the turn of the century."

These people were nearly all men who had reached maturity only during the period of the Revolution. Saint-Simon, indeed, was born in 1760, but Owen and Fourier were only eighteen and seventeen when the Bastille fell, while Cabet was born in the year before that event.

The strength of all these lay in their criticism of society, their dawning sense of the fact that the masses were exploited. Their

weakness came from the fact that these masses, even in England, did not yet constitute a working class in the modern sense of the term. So the regeneration of humanity could only be the work of the genius, the exceptional man imposing his will upon the herd.

“The problem of social organisation”, wrote Saint-Simon, “must be solved for the people. The people themselves are passive and listless and must be discounted in any consideration of the question.”

His Utopia was one in which the industrial bourgeoisie and the technicians, between whom he never clearly distinguished, should become the ruling class: the bourgeois revolution was to be carried to its conclusion by the enthronement of a capitalism which had somehow ceased to exploit and a capitalist class that had somehow become altruistic. The general picture is very similar to some of H. G. Wells’ forecasts, or to what it was fashionable a few years ago to call the Managerial Revolution.

If Fourier, with his grandiose schemes for a world covered with a network of loosely related phalanxes, is more in line with the kind of utopian speculation to which we have grown accustomed, he presents his schemes with a background of riotous imagination compared to which the *Arabian Nights* is sober realism. Nevertheless, there are many important positive aspects, especially in his conception of man as a many sided being who had to be developed in all directions. He wished to end both the excessive division of labour which was making the worker, in Marx’s phrase, “part of a detail machine”, and the division created by capitalism between town and country which was equally disastrous for both. And while, like all the utopians, he believed that man could be moulded by his environment, he also understood that society cannot be arbitrarily shaped without taking into account the character of man at any given time. It is in his broad fundamental ideas that Fourier is greatest: in applying them he involves himself in a tangle of metaphysical absurdities which often blind us to the importance of what he is saying.

It was in England that the development of capitalism and of the working class was most rapid, and in England, and with Owen, utopian socialism reached its highest point. Owen was first of all a successful capitalist, at a period when the capitalist was still the

actual organiser of production: he knew from the inside the new machines and factories, he had a close daily contact with the industrial workers. It was this practical knowledge, allied to and transforming the theoretical outlook which he shared with the other utopian socialists, which gave him his peculiar importance. Above all, he thought of men as living in society and not as isolated individuals.

When he spoke of men's character being formed for them by environment, he had a social process in mind:

"Any character" he wrote "from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened may be given to *any community* [my italics], even to the world at large, by applying certain measures, which are to a great extent at the command, and under the control, or easily made so, of those who possess the government of nations."

This was not a mere theoretical idea, for it goes in no way beyond what Owen had himself proved by his work at New Lanark, or what was afterwards proved at the Owenite community at Ralahine in Ireland, the only one which met with reasonable success.

Yet the second half of the quotation is as important as the first: Owen's appeal for a long time was to those possessing the government of nations. Like other utopian socialists he saw neither the fact nor the role of the class struggle and believed that the ruling class were as open to conviction and as ready to act on the dictates of reason as he was himself. "No obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment except ignorance", he wrote in 1816.

Owen's experiences at New Lanark, where he reduced hours, increased wages, provided lavish social services and still found it possible to produce substantial profits, convinced him that the productive forces had developed to such a degree that the possibility of universal plenty should be obvious to all. In a generation a vast accumulation of wealth had taken place and "this new power was the creation of the working class". Yet the working class alone enjoyed none of the benefits, and Owen, hitherto an exceptionally enlightened and philanthropic manufacturer now grasped the point that this was the result of exploitation, that the workers could only become prosperous if this exploitation were brought to an end. At this stage the readiness of the ruling class

to listen to reason quickly ended, and Owen found that it was to the workers he must turn if he wanted to be heard.

The outcome of Owen's New Lanark experiences was his plan for the establishment of "Villages of Co-operation". At the beginning these were to be set up by the government as a method of providing work for the unemployed. Gradually, as he realised that the authorities would never adopt his plan, and with his increasing contact with the workers, among whom it was greeted with enthusiasm, the plan transformed itself in his mind into something far more ambitious. The Villages, in which industry and agriculture were to be combined, must be "founded on the principle of united labour, expenditure and property, and equal privileges". Presently he conceived the idea that a network of such Villages, expanding and prospering as he was convinced they must, and giving each other mutual support, would cover the whole country and replace the existing competitive system with one based on the principle of co-operation. Much of the rest of his life was spent in unsuccessful attempts to establish such communities: the result was something of which neither he, nor any one else at this time, dreamed, the vast Co-operative Movement and the idea of the Co-operative Commonwealth with which it is associated.

Up till 1820 he had been an exceptionally successful man of business, but, had his career ended then, he would hardly be remembered today. In the later part of his life few of his practical ventures ended without disaster, but he played a decisive part in the beginnings of almost every valuable development of the age. His share in the growth of the Trade Union and Co-operative Movements was only more important than his work for factory legislation and for educational progress.

Above all, though he was not the first socialist, he was the man through whom socialism first left the study and gripped the masses. It is true of course that Owen's socialism was of a limited character. He did not see the workers as a creative force, but only as a means through which his own regenerating ideas could operate: to the end he retained a good deal of the character of the enlightened master who wished to guide and control the working class movement as he had guided and controlled his employees at New Lanark. Nor did he ever lose the belief that socialism could be brought about by the formation of model co-operative communities which would eliminate competition by

the example of their success. The story of the Owenite communities and of the reasons for their failure can have no place in this book, nor are they what made Owen a great historical landmark. His real work was to give a new object and direction to the British working class movement, which carried it beyond the limited radicalism of Cobbett and his associates, and, very quickly, beyond Owen himself. Owen attracted a host of disciples, many of whom played important parts in the Chartist and other movements.

One of these disciples was a young man called John Goodwin (or, as he later preferred to call himself, Goodwyn) Barmby. Barmby was born in 1820 at the Suffolk village of Yoxford, where his father was an attorney. He was intended for the church, but when he was 14 his father died and he appears to have taken his education in hand himself. At any rate he did not attend any school and speaks of a boyhood spent in roaming the fields and reading poetry. His reading, if a little unusual, was certainly wide. In 1837 he went to London, where he must have moved in Owenite and radical circles, since we find him, on his return to Suffolk, entering wholeheartedly into the Chartist movement. During 1839 the local press contains a number of reports of meetings addressed by him, both in Ipswich, which was the main centre of Chartist activity, and in villages in various parts of East Suffolk. There are also numerous letters from him, on all sorts of subjects from the Repeal of the Union to Church Bells, into all of which the topic of Chartism is somehow introduced.

Early in 1840 he visited Paris, where he claims that

“at a certain interview at this time with a celebrated Frenchman, he was the first to pronounce the now famous name of Communism.”

Whether or not this claim to absolute priority can be substantiated, there is no doubt, I think, that Barmby was the first to adopt the name Communist for any organisation in England. On his return to London in 1841 he founded the Communist Propaganda Society, later called the Universal Communitarian Association. He was not free from the weakness common to the utopian socialists of picturing themselves as saviours of mankind, and this is already shown by his adoption of 1841 as Year One of the new Communist Calendar, or by the tone of a letter, written inside the cover of the copy of the Association's journal, *The*

*Educational Circular and Communist Apostle* now in the Ipswich Public Library, which is subscribed

“Barmby, President in Chief  
To Commoner T. Glide.”

Barmby at this date was still a little less than 21!

We are not told the name of the “famous Frenchman”, but the evidence available suggests that it may have been Cabet, whom Barmby probably met in London in 1838, was certainly on good terms with in Paris in 1841, and with whom he afterwards corresponded. Cabet in 1840 had just made a sensation with his utopian romance *Un voyage en Icarie*, which was to give him for a few years a position in the French working-class movement comparable to that held by Owen somewhat earlier in England. Cabet had taken part in the Revolution of 1830 but was presently banished to England as an uncomfortably radical politician. Here he became acquainted with Owen and with the writings of More and Harrington. Under this stimulus he began a study of utopian literature which led him to the writing of *Un voyage en Icarie*, a work rather eclectic than original. Its enthusiasm and apparent practicability, which made it boundlessly popular in France a century ago, cannot now hide the pomposity and the poverty of invention which make Icaria surely the drabbest Utopia between Nova Solyma and Bellamy’s Boston.

What is important in it is not the utopian details but the fact that Cabet tried to complete the work of the French Revolution by giving a new content to the old slogans. In Icaria equality means not merely equality before the law but economic equality worked out to a mechanical nicety which would be terrifying if it could be taken seriously. Everyone is to live in the same kind of house, to eat the same food in communal restaurants, to work the same number of hours, and the same hours, every day, and to wear the uniform proper to his or her age, calling and circumstance. On this basis, Icaria is a completely democratic Republic:

“It is the Republic or Community which alone is the owner of everything, which organises the workers, and causes the factories and storehouses to be built, which sees that the land is tilled, that houses are built and that all the objects necessary for feeding, clothing and housing each family and each citizen are provided.”



Cabet intended his book only as a theoretical essay in the manner of More, but he was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm with which it was received and forced reluctantly into the leadership of a mass movement which hoped to regenerate France and the world by setting up Icarian communities in America. Nobody on a similar mission ever set out with such hopes and such support as the first body of colonists who left for Texas in 1847. The hopes were disappointed, the support dwindled rapidly after 1848, every kind of hardship and misfortune was encountered, but up to a point the attempt succeeded. Despite all external difficulties and a series of internal feuds and secessions, for which Cabet himself was certainly partly to blame, the Icarian communities survived for 50 years, a length of life without parallel in the history of utopian colonies.

Barmby was certainly strongly influenced by Cabet at this stage, and when he spoke of Communism he meant something like Icarian communities with the addition of a rather Shelleyan pantheism. He now began to turn his mind increasingly towards the possibility of founding such a community. He did not abandon Chartism—in 1841 he was elected as the Suffolk delegate to the Convention and later in the same year was adopted by the Ipswich Chartists as their prospective Parliamentary candidate—but Chartism, however excellent in itself as an immediate step, began to seem a small matter to one who dreamed of the transformation of the entire human race.

“Neither democracy or aristocracy”, he wrote a little later, “have anything to do with Communism. They are party terms for the present. In future Governmental politics will be succeeded by industrial administration.”

Meanwhile he seems to have joined for a short time the Alcott House Concordium, founded on Ham Common by James Pierrepont Greaves. When this broke up (largely because the members objected to a diet of raw vegetables during the winter months) he was attracted by the efforts of the Tropical Emigration Society to establish a settlement in Venezuela<sup>1</sup> and there was a project for a Communitorium at Hanwell and another on the island of Sark. Another venture was the publication, in January, 1842, of a

<sup>1</sup> Readers of *Alton Locke* will remember the passionate longing of its Chartist hero to settle in some tropical country, and how he did so after the collapse of Chartism.

magazine, *The Promethean*. The name is significant both of Barmby's debt to Shelley and more particularly because of the place occupied by Prometheus in the radical thought of the time. Prometheus was the redeemer of man through knowledge, the hero who braved the wrath of obscurantists and gods to bring man his heritage that was deliberately withheld. Like Owen, Barmby believed that there was no obstacle but ignorance.

The four issues of *The Promethean* contain articles by Barmby on a quite extraordinary variety of subjects. Besides one series on Communism and another on Industrial Organisation, there is *An Essay Towards Philanthropic Philology*, advocating a universal language, *The Amelioration of Climature in Communalisation*, on the effect of human activity on climate and the prospect of climate control in the future, and *Past, Present and Future Chronology. An Historic Introduction to the Communist Calendar*.

*The Promethean* was not a success, but the Communitarian Association seems to have continued to exist on a small scale and at some point was reconstituted as the Communist Church. About this time, and possibly at Ham Common, Barmby met a young man of his own age, Thomas Frost, whose *Forty Years' Recollections* (1880) is the main authority for the next phase of his career. Frost describes Barmby as

"a young man of gentlemanly manners and a soft, persuasive voice, wearing his light brown hair parted in the middle after the fashion of the Concordist brethren, and a collar and tie *à la Byron*." He found Barmby "conversant with the whole range of Utopian literature" and he "blended with the Communistic theory of society the pantheistic views of Spinoza, of which Shelley is in this country the best known exponent."

The two agreed to revive *The Communist Chronicle* as a penny weekly, and it was published by Hetherington. It was in *The Communist Chronicle* that Barmby's utopian romance, *The Book of Platonopolis* appeared as a serial. Unless a file of the *Chronicle* remains hidden in some library, this utopia appears to be completely lost, but it is probable that a very fair idea of its character and contents is given in Frost's summary:

"This was a vision of the future, a dream of the rehabilitation of the earth and of humanity; of Communisteries built of marble and porphyry, in which the commoners dine off gold and

silver plate, in banqueting-halls furnished with the most exquisite productions of the painter and sculptor, and enlivened with music; where the steam cars carry them from one place to another as often as they desire a change of residence, or, if they wish to vary the mode of travelling, balloons and aerial ships are ready to transport them through the air; where, in short, all that has been imagined by Plato, More, Bacon and Campanella is reproduced, and combined with all that modern science has effected or essayed for lessening human toil or promoting human enjoyment."

If we add to this account the list of forty four "Societarian Wants" published in the first issue of *The Promethean*, of which the first ten are:

- "1. Community of sentiment, labour and property.
- "2. Abbreviation of manual labour by machinery.
- "3. Organisation of Industry in general and particular functions.
- "4. Unitary architecture of habitation.
- "5. The Marriage of the city and the country.
- "6. Economy through combination in domestics.
- "7. Love through universality in ecclesiastics.
- "8. Order through justice or abstract mathematics in politics.
- "9. Medicinally prepared diet.
- "10. Common or contemporaneous consumption of food"

and compare all this with the arrangements of Cabet's *Icaria*, we need not perhaps too much regret the disappearance of *The Book of Platonopolis*.

Proposals for a Communitorium on the island of Sark and on the outskirts of London came to nothing and there was a growing friction. Of this we have only Frost's account, but it would appear that while he wished to develop *The Communist Chronicle* as a common organ for all existing socialist and communist groups, Barmby wanted it to serve the ends of his Communist Church. By about 1845 a break took place which quickly killed both *Chronicle* and a *Communist Journal* which Frost attempted to run in competition with it.

The remainder of Barmby's story can be told more briefly. 1848 found him once more in Paris, but soon after this he took

a new turn, shedding his utopian communism to become a Unitarian minister. He remained politically active, however, became a member of the Council of Mazzini's International League and took part in the movements in defence of Polish, Italian and Hungarian liberation. In 1867, while Unitarian minister at Wakefield, he organised a big meeting to demand parliamentary reform. In 1879 his health broke down and he returned to Yoxford where he died in 1881.

But in fact the significant part of his career ended in the Chartist Forties, for those years marked also the ending of utopian socialism in England. In one sense the very development of the working class movement which culminated in Chartism made it superfluous: utopianism is a characteristic of an immature working class. But it is also true that for these few years the general growth of the movement also stimulated utopianism, so that it went out like a rocket, in a blaze of splendour. It was in these years, the years from Owen's Queenwood (1839) to O'Connor's Land Scheme (c. 1846), that the imagination of the masses was most easily stirred. Chartism did not prevent thousands from seeking parallel ways of release from their sufferings, indeed, it was from this desire for release, this stirring of the imagination that Chartism in turn drew much of its vitality.<sup>1</sup>

After 1848 circumstances changed abruptly. The political defeat of Chartism disappointed many. The ending of the years of slump and crisis and the opening of the great capitalist boom of the mid-century set the working class movement on a new and more prosaic course. The discovery of the American and Australian gold fields and the rapid advance in land and sea transport led

<sup>1</sup> This stirring of the imagination in Chartism, and its turn into Utopian forms is well illustrated by a poem written by Ernest Jones, while in prison between July, 1848, and July, 1850. *The New World: A democratic poem*, gives, in language not unlike that of Barmby, but with greater precision and maturity of thought, a picture of a classless world in which nature is transformed by science and man in turn transforms himself:

"Mechanic power then ministers to health,  
And lengthening leisure gladdens greating wealth. . . .  
No fevered lands with burning plagues expire,  
But draw the rain as Franklin drew the fire;  
Or far to mountains guide the floating hail,  
And whirl on barren rocks its harmless flail."

Like all the Utopians of the age, Jones saw in science a liberating force, but he was already learning from the experience of Chartism and the teaching of Marx and Engels that this force could only be set in motion through the conquest of power by the working class.

to an epoch of large scale emigration in which the kind of energy that had gone into the establishment of Owenite or Icarian communities now spent itself on more individual pioneering in the newly opened territories. In the light of this, Barmby's whole career, and not least his abandonment of utopianism after 1848, seems to have a significance out of all proportion to his intrinsic importance.

It is difficult not to see him as a slightly comic figure, this earnest young man so determinedly setting out to be the saviour of mankind. Frost says of him:

"It was the misfortune of those who accepted him for their leader that they never knew the goal to which he was leading them. Viewing his erratic flights in the past by the light of his career in later years it would seem that, while endeavouring to form a church which should be 'the Sacred Future of Society', he was really still groping towards the light and seeking for something which eluded him."

Erratic and pretentious though he was, Barmby had energy and imagination and a contact with the mainstream of the mass movement which he never entirely lost. Like all the utopians he knew both what was wrong and what was needed. The something that eluded him was the knowledge of how to bridge the gap between what existed and the world he desired. Yet at this very time Chartism was helping Marx to perfect his science of the movement of society: 1848 was not only the year of the defeat of Chartism, it was also the Year of Revolutions and of *The Communist Manifesto*.

### 3. *The Book of the Machines*

After Chartism, the Year of Revolutions and *The Communist Manifesto* the old style utopias *should* have come to an abrupt end. It should have been clear that the practical questions now were, how would the new socialist society emerge from existing society, and, in accordance with its origin and the history of its growth, what were its characteristics likely to be? But in fact it was more than a quarter of a century before these questions were seriously put, and the gap between Barmby and Bellamy, which corresponds also to the classic period of expanding British capitalism, is conveniently occupied with two utopias which are concerned

not with these fundamental questions but with incidental aspects of nineteenth century bourgeois society considered as a going concern.

*The Coming Race* by Lord Lytton (1870) and *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler (1872) are books so different in spirit and temper that it is hard to realise that their publication was almost simultaneous, but they have this much in common: both are concerned with the superstructure of society, the basis is never questioned or even explained. Both books deal, in their different ways, with such questions as religion, marriage and sex relations, education, crime and punishment, and, especially, with the effects of machinery and the development of science on human happiness. It is characteristic of both that questions are put rather than answered: Butler's satire is so involved that in the end his meaning is often left obscure, while Lytton's hero, though admiring the underground Utopia which he discovers, suffers so severely from a 'discouragement', rather like that which strikes down the 'short lived' in Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, that he is delighted in the end to return to the world from which he came.

Lytton, dandy, politician and best-selling Victorian novelist, young radical and old Tory, was the last of that series of brilliant young men whom Godwin drew around him. Written at the very end of his life, and thirty five years after the death of Godwin, *The Coming Race* has hardly a page in which Godwin's influence cannot be traced, though there is evidence also of a study both of the utopian socialists and the classical utopian writers like More and Bacon. All this is blended with Lytton's aristocratic and Tory outlook, though it is also true that there was much in Godwin's abstract intellectualism that was not incompatible with Toryism by 1870. Lytton's ambiguous standpoint can be illustrated by a passage in which the hero (an American) is made to extol his native land after the style of Swift among the Houyhnhnms:

"I touched but slightly, though indulgently, on the antiquated and decaying institutions of Europe, in order to expatiate on the present grandeur and prospective pre-eminence of that glorious American Republic, in which Europe enviously seeks its model and tremblingly foresees its doom . . . dwelling on the excellence of democratic institutions, their promotion of tranquil happiness by the government of party, and the mode in which they diffused such happiness throughout

the community by preferring, for the exercise of power and the acquisition of honours, the lowliest citizens in point of property, education and character. Fortunately recollecting the peroration of a speech, on the purifying influences of American democracy, made by a certain eloquent senator (for whose vote in the Senate a Railway Company, to which my two brothers belonged, had just paid 20,000 dollars), I wound up by repeating its glowing predictions of the magnificent future that smiled upon mankind—when the flag of freedom should float over an entire continent, and two hundred millions of intelligent citizens, accustomed from infancy to the daily use of revolvers, should apply to a cowering universe the doctrine of the Patriot Monroe."

In part such a passage reflects the hatred of the average English Tory for American or any other democracy, a hatred particularly acute in the years just after the Civil War, and Lytton in *The Coming Race* certainly takes every opportunity to attack and disparage democracy as the worst possible form of government. But it reflects also the great change that had taken place since Blake, Paine and Coleridge had hailed the revolutionary democracy of America as a new dispensation, when, for a few years, America and Utopia had seemed to be almost identical. The visit of Dickens to America and the publication of his *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843) marks an awareness of the corruption of that democracy accompanying the growth of capitalism, and by 1870 the beginnings of monopoly and a whole series of resounding scandals were exposing features of the American way of life which have since become more unpleasantly obvious. It did not need a Tory to see that the 'pure' bourgeois democracy of the United States could become every bit as corrupt and predatory as the varied combinations of feudal and capitalist society that existed in Europe. It was already clear that free enterprise, the enlightened exercise of reason and self interest without the interference of kings, priests or nobility, could never produce the Utopia which had been so confidently expected from it.

Lytton, of course, could not look forward to socialism for a solution. He seems to have envisaged some form of society in which Toryism met Godwinian anarchism on the ground that in a completely patriarchal society everyone would know and accept their place as in a happy family, and that every form of

government and compulsion would then become superfluous. He certainly accepted Godwin's view that a community so organised must of necessity be small: the tribes of the Vril-ya did not often contain many more than 50,000 souls.

The story of *The Coming Race* is simple enough. Its rich American hero discovers a vast underground country while exploring a mine. This country is inhabited partly by the very highly civilised Vril-ya and partly by much more numerous nations in various stages of more or less democratic barbarism. The distinguishing feature of the Vril-ya, from which their name derives, is the possession of Vril, a force comparable in many ways with atomic energy, but so completely controlled that it is contained in a light staff carried by all individuals and can be used at will for any purpose of construction or destruction. It is Vril which has transformed the lives of these people, abolishing war, making government unnecessary, and, indeed, impossible, since every individual has the power, if he chooses to exercise it, to destroy the whole community in a moment. Vril also provides such a supply of energy for productive purposes that an age of plenty exists. Most work is done by elaborate machines or by Vril-operated robots, but what dirty or unpleasant work does remain is left, as in Fourier's phalanxes, to children. Since literature and the arts have also ceased to exist to any extent, it is a little difficult to discover how the adult Vril-ya actually pass their time.

Most of the book is occupied with an account of their customs, history and beliefs: in general the result is, as I have suggested, a compost of Godwin, Owen, Fourier and Cabet: when Lytton departs from the traditional utopian features his poverty and confusion of ideas become apparent. In spite of some superficially 'Socialist' details his Utopia has as its basis a naïvely Tory capitalism, in which private ownership continues but exploitation and poverty have been ironed out, and the rich are far too gentlemanly to regard their wealth as anything but a source of rather irksome obligations. The hero's host explains gravely:

"Ana [men] like myself, who are very rich, are obliged to buy a great many things they do not require, and live on a very large scale when they might prefer to live on a small one. . . . But we must all bear the lot assigned to us in this short passage through time that we call life. After all, what are a hundred



years, more or less, to the age through which we must pass hereafter? Luckily I have one son who likes great wealth. He is a rare exception to the rule, and I own I cannot understand it."

Similarly, though an air of novelty is given to sex relations by the reversal of the roles conventionally assigned to men and women, in essentials the picture presented is no different from what might be seen in any fashionable Victorian drawing-room. The hero at a party observes:

"Wherever I turned my eyes, or lent my ears, it seemed to me that the Gy (woman) was the wooing party and the An (man) the coy and reluctant one. The pretty innocent airs which the An gave himself on being thus courted, the dexterity with which he evaded direct answers to professions of attachment, or turned into jest the feathery compliments addressed to him, would have done honour to the most accomplished coquette."

The right of women in this underworld Utopia to make sexual advances brings the plot to such conclusion as it has. Two Gy-ei (seven feet high) make the most determined attempts to secure the hero, who might well have found such a situation alarming even if he had not been warned that if he gave way he would certainly be reduced to a cinder by the power of Vrîl in order to avoid the contamination of this super-race by inferior stock. Eventually he escapes to the surface world, thoroughly scared and full of forebodings of the time when the Vrîl-ya will re-emerge into the air and colonise the earth after exterminating its inhabitants.

In many ways *The Coming Race* is a trivial book, and its main interest is as an illustration of the way the rational radicalism of the enlightenment had become vulgarised and drained of its revolutionary content after a century of capitalist advance. *Erewhon*, published only two years later, though it seems at first sight a far more modern work, and though it is written on an altogether different level of sophistication, is nevertheless equally mid-Victorian in a somewhat different manner. It is a prospect of Utopia from the study window of a country rectory through the eyes of the rector's brilliant, eccentric son. And it is one of the characteristics of the rector's clever son that he is able to feel supremely detached while in fact remaining very much a part of his environment. Such was peculiarly the case with Samuel

Butler, and it is this which gives to *Erewhon* its unique flavour.

The world of the more prosperous clergy into which he was born, people with good livings and ample private incomes, was in itself as isolated as it could well be. Its money did not stink: it had no visible connection with the productive process at any point: it never encountered the working class except as servants or as respectful, hat-touching rustics. And even from this world Butler set deliberately to work to detach himself.

"Melchisidek", he wrote in one of his jottings, "was a really happy man. He was without father, without mother and without descent. He was an incarnate batchelor. He was a born orphan."

In the course of his life he quarrelled not only with his family but with every religious, scientific or literary group that came across his path.

Yet he always returned, just as the section in his *Notebooks* headed *Rebelliousness* is followed by another headed *Reconciliation*. He quarrelled with his family yet he never broke with them, just as his criticism of society never came to the point of questioning the basis on which the comfortable, academic middle class existed and his criticism of religion never came to the point of an atheism which would have made nonsense of their comfortable, academic ideas. He loved to shock and alarm, but never to a degree that would have made him finally unacceptable. It is perhaps characteristic that, when he had shocked his father by refusing to take Holy Orders, it was to New Zealand, then the most anglican and gentlemanly of colonies, that he agreed to go and try his hand at sheep farming. All the same it was New Zealand that gave him the distance and the sharpness that were necessary to enable him to see England in a new light. New Zealand as well as the rectory had its part in *Erewhon*. Butler proved a very good farmer and reacted to this pioneering life with delight. The settlement at this time was on the East coast, dominated by the Western Ranges, against which it pushed continually, trying to find ways through or more sheep pasture. Butler took an active part in this exploration, fascinated by the unknown.

"Few people", he wrote in *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, "believe in the existence of a moa. If one or two be yet living, they will probably be found on the West Coast,

that yet unexplored region of forest which may contain sleeping princesses and gold in blocks and all sorts of good things."

This was the spirit in which Higgs, the hero of *Erewhon*, set out on his journey over the range.

The Utopia he discovers, Erewhon (Nowhere) is of all its kind the most difficult to classify. It is neither positive—an example to be followed, nor negative—an awful warning. It is indeed a veritable *Mundus Alter et Idem*, an antipodean country like and unlike our own, with its own wisdom and its own folly, different from ours but subtly complementary, so that it satirises and criticises on two or three different planes simultaneously. Its hero is at one and the same time Butler who satirises and a priggish young anglican who is the object of the satire. Erewhon and England are, as it were, the left and right foot of the same pair of boots.

Higgs, then, pushes into the mountains as Butler had done, and emerges into a country with a social structure and a cultural level very similar to our own. One immediately striking difference is the complete absence of machinery. How a society with a medieval productive technique could in other ways resemble industrial England is one of the class of questions Butler is never sufficiently interested to ask. Higgs discovers presently that the absence of machinery is not due to lack of invention but to deliberate policy. Some five hundred years before, a civil war had ended with the victory of the machine-wrecking party and the total destruction of all machinery, and since that time its manufacture or use has been prohibited under the severest penalties, penalties from which Higgs barely escaped from being in possession of a watch. All this is explained in a long section of *Erewhon* entitled *The Book of the Machines*.

Here, as usual, Butler seems to be saying a number of things at once. In part this is an attack on mechanical materialism, in which he uses his favourite method of carrying an argument to the logical point at which its absurdity becomes self-evident. In this case, starting from the argument that man is really nothing but a machine, he suggests that, if so, the machine is a potential man and may in the course of evolution become human and even superhuman.

"After all then it comes to this, that the difference between the life of a man and that of a machine is one rather of degree

than of kind, though differences in kind are not wanting. An animal has more provision for emergency than a machine. The machine is less versatile; its range of action is narrow; its strength and accuracy in its own sphere are superhuman, but it shows badly in a dilemma; sometimes when its normal action is disturbed, it will lose its head, and go from bad to worse like a lunatic in a raging frenzy; but here, again, we are met by the same consideration as before, namely, that the machines are still in their infancy; they are mere skeletons without muscles and flesh."

In this sense *The Book of the Machines* was Butler's first shot in the war against the Darwinians, waged under the slogan of 'creative evolution'.

This, however, is only part of the story. He argues, or the Erewhonian book he pretends to quote argues, that machines are a menace to man, that, beginning in a humble way as his servants, they are rapidly becoming his masters and may in the end be able to dispense with him.

"It can be answered that even though machines should hear never so well and speak never so wisely, they will always do the one or the other for our advantage, not their own, that man will always be the ruling spirit and the machine the servant. . . . That is all very well. But the servant glides by imperceptible approaches into the master; and we have come to such a pass that, even now, man must suffer terribly on ceasing to benefit the machines.

". . . How many men at this hour are living in a state of bondage to the machines? How many spend their whole lives, from the cradle to the grave, in tending them by night and day? Is it not plain that the machines are gaining ground upon us, when we reflect on the increasing number of those who are bound down to them as slaves, and of those who devote their whole souls to the advancement of the mechanical kingdom?

"... In the meantime the stoker is almost as much a cook for his engine as our own cooks are for ourselves. Consider also the pitmen and coal merchants and coal trains, and the men who drive them, and the ships that carry coals—what an army of servants do the machines thus employ! Are there not probably more men engaged in tending machinery than in tending men?

Do not machines eat as it were by mannery? Are we not ourselves creating our own successors in the supremacy of the earth? daily adding to the beauty and delicacy of their organisation, daily giving them greater skill and supplying more and more of that self-regulating, self-acting power which will be better than any intellect?"

In all this it is not hard to see an expression of the widespread horror at the results of capitalist machine production, a horror especially widespread among intellectuals of the nineteenth century, and which Butler shared with people as different from himself and each other as Blake, Cobbett and Ruskin. But having said so much Butler remembered that first tools and then machines may also be regarded as an extension of the human body, adapting it to new purposes and enabling it to increase its control over its environment. Even under capitalism machinery has a liberating as well as an enslaving character. This argument he puts into the mouth of another Erewhonian author:

"Civilisation and mechanical progress advanced hand in hand, each developing and being developed by the other, the earliest accidental use of the stick having set the ball rolling, and the prospect of advantage keeping it in motion. In fact, machines are to be regarded as the mode of development by which human organism is now especially advancing, every past invention being an addition to the resources of the human body. Even community of limbs is thus rendered possible to those who have so much community of soul as to own money enough to pay a railway fare; for a train is only a seven-leagued foot that five hundred may own at once."

Butler does not attempt to reconcile the two viewpoints, merely observing that the first writer "was considered to have the best of it", and I think that the whole section reflects very exactly not only his own ambivalent attitude to industrialism but that of the Victorian bourgeoisie as a whole, the mixture of pleasure, amazement and horror at this thing they had created, with its possibilities of leisure and wealth, its actual accompaniment of squalor and misery, and the under-tones of menace, relatively subdued in 1870 but never quite absent, which threatened them with destruction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Erewhon*, though published in 1872, was probably written before the Paris Commune.

All this is implied rather than stated, and, immediately, Butler seems to have felt that the Erewhonians did better without machinery. One of the things that had delighted him about New Zealand was the good health and good looks of the people there, the "shaggy clear-complexioned men with the rowdy hats", and he must have compared them with the town-dwelling, machine-operating inhabitants of England. Butler saw men free and happy without machinery. What he didn't see was that the life of the New Zealand settlers would not have been possible at all without English capital, the English market and the English machine-made goods they were able to buy with their wool. Middle class, shy and rather ungainly himself, he idealised the peasant and the aristocrat much as Yeats did a generation later. Therefore in Erewhon he created the Utopia of physical perfection:

"Lastly, I should say that the people were of a physical beauty which was simply amazing. I never saw anything in the least comparable to them. The women were vigorous, and had a most majestic gait, their heads being set upon their shoulders with a grace beyond all power of expression. . . .

"The men were as handsome as the women beautiful. I have always delighted in and revered beauty; but I felt simply abashed in the presence of such a splendid type—a compound of all that is best in Egyptian, Greek and Italian. The children were infinite in number, and exceedingly merry; I need hardly say that they came in for their full share of the prevailing beauty."

On this basis Butler built an entertaining fantasy of topsy-turveydom in which ill health is regarded as a crime and savagely punished, while moral shortcomings are a matter for pity and careful treatment. Once again there is an ambivalence: negatively there is extremely telling satire on English criminal justice and our whole unscientific approach to crime, but behind that is a profound feeling that beauty and good health and good luck (in Erewhon misfortune is also punishable) are the supreme blessings and that men both are and ought to be rewarded for possessing them and punished for not possessing them. He certainly had a full measure of the belief of his class that if a man was poor or unfortunate it was probably his own fault.

Butler's attitude to the conventional code prevailing in Victorian society was similar. The great, though never openly

acknowledged god of Erewhon is Ydgrun (Grundy), whose worship consists in doing what the world does. Butler pokes fun at Ydgrun, who, he knows perfectly well, is as often cruel and absurd in Erewhon as in England, yet he concludes that on the whole she is the best practical guide for life and that the "high Ydgrundites", that is, the cultured upper classes, "have got about as far as it is in the right nature of man to go".

"Take her all in all", he concludes, "she was a beneficent and useful deity, who did not care how much she was denied so long as she was obeyed and feared, and who kept hundreds of thousands in those paths which make life tolerably happy, who would never have kept there otherwise, and over whom a higher and more spiritual ideal would have had no power."

Whether he is discussing religion (the Musical Banks), education (the Colleges of Unreason) or any other institution, Butler's attitude is similar. There is direct satire, there is an indirect satire by granting to the most absurd Erewhonian institutions their special and unexpected measure of good sense, like the existence of a Chair of Worldly Wisdom in the Colleges of Unreason, and finally, when he feels that his class has been sufficiently teased and irritated, he will make amends in some way or another so that in the end they can feel that they are really good fellows and that the world would be a poorer place without them. At once bold and timid he is like a weak swimmer, forever striking out from the shore and as often heading back in panic the moment he finds he is out of his depth. His criticism is family criticism, never going far beyond what the rest of the family will regard as permissible. It is none the less well directed and entertaining and, up to a point, valuable criticism for all that.

A word should be said in conclusion about the machinery of these two books. *Erewhon* is almost the last of the old style place Utopias, situated in some as yet undiscovered corner of the earth. We have seen that this was the result of the special circumstances of Butler's life in New Zealand. As a rule, even before this, the device was wearing thin as the blank spaces on the map filled up. Henceforth new machinery was called for and Utopia was transferred either into the more or less distant future, or, as in Lytton's book to an underground world, or even to another planet. *The Coming Race* is, I think, the first of the new class of utopias in this sense, just as *Erewhon* is among the last of the old.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DREAM OF WILLIAM MORRIS

Here too industry has taken on a different character. The ten-year cycle seems to have been broken down now that, since 1870, American and German competition have been putting an end to English monopoly in the world market. In the main branches of industry a depressed state of business has prevailed since 1868, while production has been slowly increasing, and now we seem both here and in America to be standing on the verge of a new crisis which in England has not been preceded by a period of prosperity. That is the secret of the sudden—though it has been slowly preparing for three years—but the present sudden emergence of a socialist movement here.

ENGELS: to Bebel, 1884.

#### 1. *News From Boston*

BELLAMY'S *Looking Backward*, published in 1888 by a then little known American novelist, had very much the same sort of immediate success as Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie*, and for very much the same sort of reason. It was written in and arose from a time of swift change and almost intolerable tension, and it seemed to many to point to a practical solution of real problems. By the mid-eighties capitalism had made immense advances in all the leading countries, and its battle with the working class that it had created was now fairly joined. For England this world advance meant the loss of a long-standing world monopoly, the so-called 'Great Depression', and a new stage in working-class political and trade union activity. In Germany and France mass Socialist parties were beginning to grow on the ruins of the dead First International. In all these countries the concentration of capital was making visible the first signs of monopoly, but it was in the U.S.A. that the most rapid progress and the clearest signs of this monopoly could be seen. Between 1859 and 1889 industrial production had increased fivefold, to reach a total of over nine billion dollars: the great empire of Standard Oil was only the most startling of its kind. Writing about 1887, Bellamy described this process as well as the fears and opposition it excited:

"Meanwhile, without being in the smallest degree checked by the clamour against it, the absorption of business by ever



larger monopolies continued. In the United States . . . there was not, after the beginning of the last quarter of the century, any opportunity whatever for individual enterprise in any important field of industry, unless backed by great capital. . . . Small businesses, as far as they still remained, were reduced to the condition of rats and mice, living in holes and corners, and counting on evading notice for the enjoyment of existence. The railroads had gone on combining till a few great syndicates controlled every rail in the land. In manufactures, every important staple was controlled by a syndicate. These syndicates, pools, trusts, or whatever the name, fixed prices and crushed all competition, except when combinations as vast as themselves arose. Then a struggle, resulting in a still greater consolidation, ensued."

No less alarming for the small capitalists, professional people and independent producers was the advance and militancy of the working class. The Knights of Labour reached their greatest membership, about 700,000, in 1886, in which year, also, the American Federation of Labour was founded: for some years there seemed every prospect of the formation of a strong American Labour Party. In the meantime there was an unprecedented outburst of strikes. To quote Bellamy once more:

"Strikes had become so common at that period that people had ceased to enquire into their particular grounds. In one department of industry or another, they had been nearly incessant ever since the great business crisis of 1873. In fact it had come to be the exceptional thing to see any class of labourers pursue their avocation steadily for more than a few months at a time."

Many of these strikes had a character more or less political:

"The working classes had quite suddenly, and very generally, become infected with a profound discontent with their condition, and an idea that it could be greatly bettered if they only knew how to go about it."

Socialism was firmly on the agenda, in America as well as in the Old World, and, as Engels commented in 1886:

"The last Bourgeois Paradise on earth is fast changing into a Purgatorio, and can only be prevented from becoming, like

Europe, an Inferno by the go-ahead pace at which the development of the newly fledged proletariat of America will take place."

Such was the background of *Looking Backward*, a background of monopoly, graft and speculation, of desperate strikes savagely repressed, the world of Rockefeller and Carnegie and of the Haymarket Martyrs, railroaded in 1884 after the explosion in Chicago of a bomb planted by the police. In Bellamy's New England, industry was expanding while great tracts of land were passing out of cultivation.

To Bellamy, a kindly, academic man, not actively associated with the movement of the working class, all this violence, greed and selfish conflict was extremely distasteful. It was untidy and unreasonable, and it was the tidiness and reason of socialism that most appealed to him. Its triumph, therefore, would be the triumph of abstract reason, not of a revolutionary class.

"*Looking Backward*, although in form a fanciful romance, is intended, in all seriousness, as a forecast, in accordance with the principles of evolution, of the next stage in the industrial and social development of humanity."

Early in the book, Bellamy explains what he means by the principles of evolution. His hero, Julian West, after a Rip Van Winkle sleep, wakes to find himself in the transformed, socialist, Boston of the year 2,000. His host and mentor, Dr. Leete, who is ever ready to explain everything at inordinate length, tells him how the change came:

"'Early in the last century the evolution was completed by the final consolidation of the entire capital of the nation. The industry and commerce of the country, ceasing to be conducted by a set of irresponsible corporations and syndicates of private persons at their own caprice and for their own profit, were intrusted to a single syndicate representing the people, to be conducted in the common interest for the common profit. The nation, that is to say, organised as one great business corporation in which all other corporations were absorbed; it became the one capitalist in place of all other capitalists, the sole employer, the final monopoly in which all previous and lesser monopolies were swallowed up, a monopoly in the profits and economies of which all citizens shared. . . .'"

“‘Such a stupendous change as you describe,’ said I, ‘did not, of course, take place without great bloodshed and terrible convulsions?’

“‘On the contrary,’ replied Dr. Leete, ‘there was absolutely no violence. The change had been long foreseen. Public opinion had become fully ripe for it, and the whole mass of the people was behind it. There was no more possibility of opposing it by force than by argument.’”

It is, in fact, an early and correspondingly naïve exposition of the now familiar doctrine of super-Imperialism, the idea that monopoly capitalism, by eliminating competition, will mechanically and painlessly transform itself into its opposite. And, inevitably, the quality of the socialism in Bellamy's Utopia is coloured by its mechanical derivation. The flat equality, the almost military regimentation of labour, the bureaucratic organisation, the rigidity of life, the value placed upon mechanical inventions for their own sake are part of his vision just because he has failed to grasp the difference in kind between capitalism and communism. In the year 2,000, according to Bellamy, everyone is to live pretty much as the comfortable middle classes of Boston lived in 1886—and like it.

It was this, probably, as much as its merits, which gave *Looking Backward* its extraordinary popularity. At a time when the professional classes and the small producers, who were still very numerous, felt caught between the Trusts and the militant workers, they were offered a prospect of Advance Without Tears, a socialism which did not force them to take sides in the battle. Bellamy was careful to disclaim any connection with the working-class movement, “the followers of the red flag” as he calls them:

“‘They had nothing to do with it [the change] except to hinder it, of course,’ replied Dr. Leete. ‘They did that very effectually while they lasted, for their talk so disgusted people as to deprive the best considered projects for social reform of a hearing.’”

The Populists and Grangeites, trying to organise the farmers and small men against the trusts, were then at their most influential: a few years later, under Bryan, they came near to capturing the Democratic Party. The People *versus* the Trusts, Man *versus* Money, were the popular slogans. It was to this public that

Bellamy came as a revelation, giving a scientific and evolutionary colour to what was really a hopeless attempt to arrest the advance of monopoly by returning to a more primitive order of things. And at the same time, his book had certain merits: in spite of what now seems an intolerably pretentious and solemn style, it is not without telling phrases and whole paragraphs of acute and damaging criticism of both the institutions and effects of capitalism. And it does at least set up standards more civilised than those of capitalism, calling attention to the possibility of ending competition and of its replacement by human co-operation in a classless society, however frigidly that society might be conceived.

For all these reasons, and perhaps because at this moment *any* book that seemed to offer a hope would have been welcomed, *Looking Backward* was successful beyond anything that Bellamy could have expected. In America hundreds of thousands of copies were sold in a few years. By 1891 Dutch, Italian, French, German and Portuguese translations had appeared. The English edition, first published in 1889, attracted almost as much attention as the American had done. Bellamy came to be regarded in the U.S.A. almost as the inventor of socialism and to be accepted as the leader of a political party whose objective was to turn the fiction of *Looking Backward* into reality. Even in England, where socialism had had a longer history and where Marxism was better known, there was a strong tendency for Bellamy's picture of life under socialism to be accepted as authoritative.

It was for this reason that William Morris made it the subject of a long and highly critical review in the Socialist League journal, *The Commonweal*, on January 22nd, 1889. I propose to quote from this review at length, because it seems to me to state perfectly the case against Bellamy, because it illustrated very clearly Morris' own view not only of Bellamy but of the nature of socialist society, and because it is hardly known, and, indeed hardly accessible, to readers of the present day. After a few general remarks Morris explains that since

“Socialists and non Socialists have been so much impressed with the book, it seems to me necessary that *The Commonweal* should notice it. For it is a ‘Utopia’. It purports to be written in the year 2,000, and to describe the state of society after a gradual and peaceful revolution has realised the Socialism which to us is in fact in but the beginning of its militant period.

It requires notice all the more because there is a danger in such a book as this: a twofold danger; for there will be some temperaments to whom the answer given to the question 'How shall we live then?' will be pleasing and satisfactory, others to whom it will be displeasing and unsatisfactory. The danger to the first is that they will accept it with all its necessary errors and fallacies (which such a book *must* abound in) as conclusive statements of facts and rules of action, which will warp their efforts into futile directions. The danger to the second, if they are but enquirers or young Socialists, is that they also accepting its speculations as facts will be inclined to say, 'If *that* is Socialism, we won't help its advent, as it holds out no hope to us.' . . .

"[Bellamy's] temperament may be called the unmixed modern one, unhistoric and unartistic; it makes its owner (if a socialist) perfectly satisfied with modern civilisation, if only the injustice, misery and waste of class society could be got rid of; which half change seems possible to him. The only ideal of life which such a man can see is that of the industrious *professional* middle-class man of today, purified from their crime of complicity with the monopolist class, and become independent instead of being, as they are now, parasitical. . . .

"It follows naturally from the author's satisfaction with the best part of modern life that he conceives of the change to Socialism as taking place without any breakdown of that life, or indeed disturbance of it, by means of the final development of the great private monopolies which are such a noteworthy feature of the present day. He supposes that these must necessarily be transformed into one great monopoly which will include the whole people and be worked for the benefit of the people. . . .

"The great change having thus peaceably and fatalistically taken place, the author has put forward his scheme of the organisation of life; which is organised with a vengeance. His scheme may be described as State Communism, worked by the vast extreme of national centralisation. The underlying vice in it is that the author cannot conceive, as aforesaid, anything else than the *machinery* of society, and that, doubtless naturally, he reads into the future of society, which he tells us is unwastefully conducted, that terror of starvation which is the necessary accompaniment of a society in which two-thirds or more of its

labour-power *is* wasted: he *tells* us that every man is free to choose his own occupation and that work is no burden to anyone, the *impression* which he produces is that of a huge standing army, tightly drilled, compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice, however wasteful and absurd, that may cast up among them.

"As an illustration it may be mentioned that everybody is to begin the serious work of production at the age of 21, work three years as a labourer, and then choose his skilled occupation and work till he is 45, when he is to knock off his work and amuse himself (improve his mind, if he has one left him). Heaven! Think of a man of 45 changing all his habits suddenly and by compulsion! . . .

"In short, a machine life is the best which Bellamy can imagine for us on all sides; it is not to be wondered at then that his only idea of making labour tolerable is to decrease the amount of it by means of fresh and ever fresh developments of machinery. . . .

"I believe that the ideal of the future does not point to the lessening of man's energy by the reduction of *labour* to a minimum, but rather to a reduction of *pain in labour* to a minimum, so small that it will cease to be pain. . . . In this part of his scheme, therefore, Mr. Bellamy worries himself unnecessarily in seeking (with obvious failure) some incentive to labour to replace the fear of starvation, which is at present our only one, whereas it cannot be too often repeated that the true incentive to happy and useful labour must be pleasure in the work itself. . . .

"It is necessary to point out that there are some Socialists who do not think that the problem of the organisation of life and necessary labour can be dealt with by a huge centralisation, worked by a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible; that on the contrary it will be necessary for the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them,<sup>1</sup> that the individual man cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other. That variety of life is as much an aim of true Communism as equality

<sup>1</sup> Compare the views of Winstanley, Godwin, Spence.

of condition, and that nothing but an union of these two will bring about real freedom. . . . And finally, that art, using that word in its widest and due signification, is not a mere adjunct of life which free and happy men can do without, but the necessary and indispensable instrument of human happiness."

Morris, with his strongly creative mind, could not rest content with a mere criticism of Bellamy's utopia. To him *Looking Backward* was a challenge which he could only answer by giving his own picture of life under communism, fully aware as he was of the errors and fallacies which such a book must abound in and quite prepared to face responsibility for his own. It seems clear that *Looking Backward* provided the stimulus for *News from Nowhere*, which began to appear as a serial in *The Commonweal* on January 11th, 1890.

## 2. *News From Nowhere*

If, as I have suggested, *Looking Backward* was the immediate provocation that led Morris to write *News from Nowhere*, it seems no less clear that he was only putting into form and words something that had long been maturing in his thoughts. There is, in the closing pages of *A Dream of John Ball*, published also in *The Commonweal*, in 1886, a plain hint that some such complementary tale was being planned, when John Ball says in parting:

"I go to life and death and leave thee; and scarce do I know whether to wish thee some dream of the days beyond thine to tell thee what shall be, as thou has told me, for I know not if that shall help or hinder thee."

Having projected us into the past and thence carried us forward in time, it was only logical for Morris to move into the future and then look back, all the more since the socialist future seemed to him in many ways akin to the feudal past of the Middle Ages.

We know, too, that the kind of life he describes in *News from Nowhere* had long been implicit in his whole work, in his architectural theory and practice and in his craftsmanship no less than in his poems and tales. Perhaps this appears most clearly in a letter written as early as 1874:

"Surely if people lived five hundred years instead of three-score and ten they would find some better way of living than in such a sordid loathsome place, but now it seems nobody's business to try to better things—isn't mine you see, in spite of all

my grumbling—but look, suppose people lived in little communities among gardens and green fields, so that you could be in the country in five minutes' walk, and had few wants, almost no furniture for instance, and no servants, and studied the (difficult) arts of enjoying life, and finding out what they really wanted: then I think one might hope civilisation had really begun."

In this letter, written long before Morris was conscious of being a socialist, the germ of *News from Nowhere* is already apparent, not least in the casual phrase about 'no servants'. It is not easy for us to realise today how revolutionary such an idea was, coming from a well-to-do man in 1874, when domestic servants were taken as a matter of course by every section above the lowest strata of the middle class. But Morris was already feeling towards the idea that inequality of condition was something unworthy of humanity, degrading equally exploiter and exploited, an idea which he was afterwards constantly enlarging, as, for example, in *Art and Socialism*. And even in 1874 I think he would have said that it was no less degrading to be the servant to a machine than to an individual. The great difference between Morris then and in 1890 was that by this latter date he *had* made it his business to try to better things and had discovered in socialism the way to go about it.

In considering the origin of *News from Nowhere* it is important to remember that in many of its details it was in line with a strong current of thought in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. From 1871 to 1884 Ruskin was writing his *Fors Clavigera*, "letters to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain", setting out the objectives of his Guild of St. George, a scheme for a network of utopian communities in which life was to be very like that described in *News from Nowhere*, though Ruskin, with his aristocratic socialism, never envisaged the fellowship and the democratic equality of life which was for Morris the crown of the work. Morris understood too, and perhaps the failure of the Guild helped to teach him, that any attempt at the piecemeal transformation of society by such methods was futile. Nevertheless, while he passed far beyond Ruskin, he learnt much from him and always regarded him with the utmost respect.

We know also that in 1885 he was reading, with peculiar interest, Richard Jefferies' *After London*:



"I read a queer book called *After London* coming down: I rather liked it: absurd hopes curled round my heart as I read it. I rather wish I were thirty years younger: I want to see the game played out."

Here we touch one of Morris' most characteristic thoughts: he was convinced capitalism was nearing its end: either there would be revolution and the birth of a socialist society, or some vast catastrophe, a reversion to barbarism and a beginning all over again. Such was his hatred of capitalism and its 'modern civilisation' that he preferred even this solution to its continued existence. There were times when he seemed even to welcome the idea of catastrophe. In a letter of this same year he wrote:

"How often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the world. . . . I used to despair once because I thought what the idiots of our day call progress would go on perfecting itself: happily I know now that all that will have a sudden check—sudden in appearance I mean—'as it was in the days of Noë.'"

More often, however, he looked forward to the positive solution of socialism, and realised that such a beginning again would solve nothing. As he wrote in *News from Nowhere*:

"Nor could it [Commercialism] have been destroyed otherwise; except, perhaps, by the whole of society gradually falling into lower depths, till it at last reached a condition as rude as barbarism, but lacking both the hope and the pleasure of barbarism. Surely the sharper, shorter remedy was the happiest."

It was precisely the picture of such a society, with the rudeness of barbarism but none of its hopes, the poverty of the Middle Ages but none of its vitality, which Morris found in *After London*. Here Jefferies describes with extraordinary vividness the face and the life of an England suddenly denuded of most of its people by some never-explained catastrophe. The woodlands creep back, river valleys become lakes or swamps, remnants of population survive here and there in tiny principalities and city states, all but the crudest and most necessary arts and crafts have vanished, corruption, serfdom and endless petty warfare are universal. Just at the close (the book was never finished) there is a hint of a new kind of state arising among the barbarian shepherd tribes on the perimeter.

Here, certainly, was destruction "as it was in the days of Noë", and much, in spite of the degeneration described, that Morris would certainly have found more to his taste than the civilisation of the nineteenth century. Still, the prospect it held out was only a second best and at most times he believed that such a desperate remedy could be avoided. *After London* is, as it were, a *News from Nowhere* in reverse—capitalism indeed destroyed but no socialism to take its place. There is no doubt, I think, that it was among the influences that went to the final shaping of Morris' Utopia.

It would be interesting to know, though there seems no direct evidence, if Morris also read another utopian romance of the period, *A Crystal Age* by W. H. Hudson, first published in 1887. It is at the least possible that he did so, since Hudson was friendly, among others, with Wilfred Scawen Blunt and R. B. Cunningham Graham, through either of whom Morris might have heard of him. However that may be, *A Crystal Age* has certainly features which remind us of *News from Nowhere*, with the socialism, of course, always excluded. The most striking thing, perhaps, about *A Crystal Age* is its complete lack of relation to anything in the existing world, except by antipathy. It is a new creation, so remote from us in time and feeling that the very memory of any kind of society now existing has been entirely lost.

What Hudson does notably share with Morris is the conception of an epoch of rest, a period in which the world stands still. This time of rest, which for Morris is no more than a temporary and relative pause between periods of more marked change, and is even so hardly consistent with his generally dialectical outlook, is for Hudson unbroken, as far as can be seen, in either direction. He describes a world of small, scattered, self-sufficient and entirely permanent families, each with its own 'house'. The individuals come and go, but their numbers remain unchanged and the 'house', the material basis and framework within which it exists, is eternal, so that almost one might say that the family exists to serve the 'house' and not the 'house' to preserve the family. Since the family is self-sufficient there is no question of exchange or exploitation; in this sense it might be said that a vaguely socialist element is present, and the scene in which the hero, a visitor from our own time, offers money as payment for a suit of clothes might have been written by Morris, except that his people are better mannered and less censorious than Hudson's. The two Utopias are similar, too, in the absence of any great

cities, in the part played by art, by handicrafts and the new pleasure which their people have found in necessary work.

Yet Morris goes far beyond Hudson not only in his sense of history but in the depth of his human feeling. For him Utopia is not somewhere remote in time or space but grows out of existing society through struggle, bearing clear traces of that struggle and of its whole past. Nor have its people really much in common with the ascetic, humourless and almost sexless creatures of Hudson. No one could imagine himself living, or could wish to live, in this Utopia any more than one could live in a stained-glass window, but Morris' has seemed to thousands not only possible but worth fighting for.

In one other respect, however, there is a resemblance worth mentioning. This is the dream structure. Hudson's hero 'wakes' from a sleep prolonged through countless centuries, and we are not told directly that the substance of the book is a dream. Yet this may perhaps be inferred from a number of details not otherwise explicable, as in the concluding pages in which he describes his own death. Bellamy, and, later, Wells use the device of a prolonged sleep, but rationalise it, giving it a pseudo-scientific explanation which is all of a piece with the spuriously scientific character of their Utopias. Such a device would have been quite out of character for Morris, the scientific nature of whose imagination does not rest on a mass of superficial detail but on his mastery of the law of movement of human society. Further, he was soaked in the literature of the Middle Ages and the barbarian North, in which the magic sleep and the dream with a purpose are familiar devices: it was as natural for him to use the dream for his picture of Socialist England as it was for Langland to use it to describe the Harrowing of Hell.

And the dream was more to Morris than a literary device. His imagination was primarily a visual one, his visual memory, as we know, quite extraordinary. It seems likely that anyone so constituted would normally have vivid and realistic dreams, and Morris in the opening pages of *A Dream of John Ball* tells us that this was so in his case, describing in detail the kind of solid, coherent and architectural dreams which he enjoyed. There is no reason to doubt that what he described there were actual experiences, nor that it was those experiences which finally determined the form of his two great socialist romances.

J. W. Mackail writes of *News from Nowhere*, with that faint air

of patronage and disparagement which he can never avoid when speaking of Morris' socialism:

"It is a curious fact that this slightly constructed and essentially insular romance has, as a Socialist pamphlet, been translated into French, German and Italian, and has probably been more read in foreign countries than any of his more important works in prose or verse."

Today it seems curious that Mackail, who with all his faults as a biographer really loved and respected Morris, could not see, what has been clear to thousands of workers in many countries, that *News from Nowhere* was, as I have tried to show, the outcome of years of thought and preparation, was cast in a form peculiarly suited to the genius of Morris, and was, in fact, the crown and climax of his whole work.

True, it is a short book, true it was written quickly and almost casually amid a press of other activities, true, and this is what the Philistines cannot stomach, it was written for a socialist periodical as ammunition for the daily battle. All this only proves, what ought not to need proof but is constantly being forgotten or denied, that it was the best of Morris that was given to the working class, and that, great as he was, he was at his greatest as a revolutionary. Into *News from Nowhere*, as into no other book, Morris packed his hopes and his knowledge, all that he had accomplished and become in a life of struggle.

This is important because, though we can say he formally became a Socialist about 1883, his life and work form a seamless whole, stretching flawless and unbroken from his early romances to the socialist works of his maturity. Morris was always learning, deepening his understanding of the world and of his own beliefs, but he had nothing to unlearn since at each new stage his present was only the fulfilment of his past. He had learned from Ruskin to see art (in the broadest sense) not as a special activity producing a special kind of luxury goods but as an essential part of the whole life of man. 'Art' was anything that was made by men who were free and who found pleasure in their work. His initial quarrel with the mass of commercially produced goods was that they were made without joy by men under compulsion. Such a view could not but lead in logic to a critique of existing society, and Morris was not the man to shrink from pushing his conclusions home to the end.

So he began early to ask, "What do men need to be happy?" Since his approach was clear and direct, with nothing of the mystic or idealist about it, his answers, too, were simple and materialist. The essentials he thought, were fellowship, abundance of the necessities of life, sun, air and free space, and joy in the work. He described such a life when he wrote of the men of Burgh Dale that they lived,

"in much ease and pleasure of life, though not delicately or desiring things out of measure. They toiled with their hands and wearied themselves; and they rested from their toil and feasted and were merry; tomorrow was not a burden to them, nor yesterday a thing they would fain forget; life shamed them not, nor did death make them afraid."

To all this one thing more was needed. In one of his earliest tales, *Svend and His Brethren* (1856) he had written of a people who were rich, strong and numerous, masters of all arts, possessed of all gifts:

"Should not then their king be proud of such a people, who seemed to help so in carrying on the world to its consummate perfection, which they even hoped their grandchildren would see?"

"Alas! Alas! they were slaves—king and priest, noble and burger, just as much as the meanest-tasked serf, perhaps even more than he, for they were so willingly, but he unwillingly enough."

Already the young Morris is passing judgment on the pride and the misery of Victorian England. From the beginning and constantly more clearly, he saw that no man could be happy except in a free society. Above all he felt this in his own experience, for he more than any man of his time had all that should make for happiness—strength and genius, ample means, devoted friends and work in which he delighted. Whatever he undertook he did well and everything he attempted was successful. But he remained unsatisfied because he could not enjoy fully what could not be enjoyed by all. "I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few", he wrote.

He began, therefore, to enquire into the nature of this freedom, to study the history of those times and societies in which it seemed the most to be found and to ask why it was so lacking in the

bourgeois democracy of nineteenth-century England. Above all he studied the literature and life of Northern Europe in its heroic age, and in Iceland he found the nearest approach, perhaps, to a free society that the world had yet seen. Quickly he grasped the essential fact that Icelandic freedom was the result of the relative absence of class divisions, and, once he had realised that freedom meant the abolition of classes he was on the road to conscious socialism. Morris was a man passionately in love with the classless society, determined to seek and ensue it by all possible means: it was in Marxism that he found the road, thereby escaping the heartbreak and frustration which D. H. Lawrence suffered in our own time in attempting the same quest without the essential clue. Morris loved the past, and understood it better than Lawrence did, but he never made the mistake of trying to return to it. When he visited Iceland it was to gain knowledge and strength for the struggle, not to escape from the present. He knew that the classless society of the future could only emerge from what actually exists and be reached through the conflict of classes, that is to say, through revolution.

That is why, though he called himself a socialist when speaking in general terms, he liked to use the word communist to define precisely the *kind* of socialist he was. And he used the word not in a pleasantly antiquarian way, but precisely, with a full understanding of its implications. In the '80s these implications were mainly two—both highly disreputable. First, a communist was an upholder of the deeds of the Paris Commune, then a matter of recent history and an object of terror to the bourgeoisie as the great example in practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Morris never tired of defending the Commune and glorifying its memory. Secondly, a communist was one who accepted the teachings of Marx as expounded in *The Communist Manifesto*. So much nonsense has been written about Morris that it is still necessary to emphasise the point that he was a Marxist as he understood Marxism—always remembering that at this date much of the important work of Marx and Engels was not available to English readers, and that in practice English socialism was still in the early growing stages, making many blunders from lack of the experience, English and international, which is now at our disposal. Those who deny Morris the name of Marxist do so either because they are so ignorant of Marxism that they cannot recognise it as it appears in his writings, expressed, often, in his very individual

style, or because they have formed a preconceived notion of Morris in defence of which they are prepared to distort the plain meaning of what he actually wrote and said.<sup>1</sup>

He was a Marxist, too, in the sense that accepting its principles he understood no less the need for practical work. From 1883, when he joined the Democratic Federation, to his death in 1896, he gave his time, energy and money without stint to the cause of socialism. It received the best of his writings during these years, but he took his full share also in the hard, routine activities of the movement, as well as in the, for him, far more unpleasant internal controversies with which the Movement was torn. To give an account of all this, or of the history of the Movement at this time would be out of place here even if space permitted it. It need only be said that in the decade before *News from Nowhere* England was shaken by the crisis accompanying the ending of its world monopoly, that it was a decade of mass unemployment and unemployed struggles, that the Trade Union Movement was revitalised under a largely socialist leadership and that socialism itself, in its modern form, began to make headway here, at first in the hands of small sects, but indirectly influencing wide masses of workers.

In all this ferment Morris played a central part, and it is the events of this decade which form the background of *News from Nowhere*. If it is richer in content than all earlier utopias this is because it was written, not in isolation, but as a part of the actual struggle by one who was both a scientific socialist and a great poet. Morris' is the first Utopia which is not utopian. In all its predecessors it is the details which catch our attention, but here, while we may be dubious about this detail or that, the important things are the sense of historical development and the human understanding of the quality of life in a classless society.

Such, in outline, were the elements that went to the making of *News from Nowhere*, those personal and peculiar to Morris as well as those arising from the conditions of the time, while some

<sup>1</sup> It may be worth while to give one example of such distortion. Lloyd Eric Grey, in *William Morris, Prophet of England's New Order*, declares that Morris wrote "to members of the Marxian Social Democratic Federation that anyone who believes that 'knife and fork' economics takes precedence over 'art and cultivation . . . does not understand what art means.'" What Morris wrote (*How I Became a Socialist*, p. 659, in Cole's Nonesuch volume) was precisely the opposite: "Surely anyone who professes to think that the question of art and cultivation must go before that of the knife and fork (and there are some who do propose that) does not understand what art means, or how that its roots must have a soil of a thriving and unanxious life."

indication has been given of their interaction. Now it is time to turn to the book itself, and to note first of all that it was intended to do a particular job, first, to replace what Morris felt to be the false picture of life under socialism drawn by Bellamy with what he felt to be a true picture, and, second, to hearten and inspire his comrades by a reminder of the positive goal towards which their efforts were leading.

For this purpose he did not need to imitate or try to rival the mechanical complications of Bellamy, the music perpetually on tap after the manner of the B.B.C. (it is characteristic of Bellamy that almost the only pleasure mentioned in his Utopia is what we call to-day 'listening to the wireless'), the vast network of tubes along which completely standardised goods were delivered to every house from huge central warehouses, the ever more complex machines. Such things might have a certain appeal in 1890, but we, who have seen to-day mechanical marvels more than Bellamy ever dreamed of, know how little such things in themselves are a guarantee of happiness. Morris, perfectly aware that socialism implies the victory of man over his environment, is not concerned with such details, which are passed over with the most casual of references. What interested him was not the complication of *things*, but the new productive relations of *people* and the transformation of human relations and human nature which they entail.

Talking to old Hammond, the historian into whose mouth he puts the tale of the coming of socialism, Morris (who tells the story throughout in the first person) mentions 'human nature':

"'Human nature!' cried the old boy impetuously; 'what human nature? The human nature of paupers, of slaves, of slave holders, or the human nature of wealthy freemen? Which? Come, tell me that!'"

It is the human nature of wealthy freemen that is the centre and permanent interest of *News from Nowhere*, a human nature which poverty, exploitation, competition, fear and greed have had no part in shaping. Given these conditions he is able to show how and why a classless society, in which the evils of capitalism have so entirely ended as to have ceased even to be a living memory, must produce a new quality of happiness, a fellowship, a toleration, a universal courtesy and a delight in life and in the material world



which we can hardly imagine. It is because Morris had the unique combination of gifts and experience which made this feat of the imagination possible for him that his book holds its place among the very few great classics of socialism. Patiently, with abundant and detailed proof, he demonstrates how one evil after another which is commonly set down to 'human nature', is in reality a consequence of capitalism.

Some critics have complained that the picture is too brightly drawn, that the men and women in this Utopia are too good to be true. I do not find any substance in such criticisms. Morris drew largely from within—he felt in himself and saw in his friends the potentialities of happiness and social living, which, stifled and frustrated as they were, could still be seen clearly enough. And he had what his critics lack, a deep understanding of the boundless possibilities of socialism, seeing in it not merely a new mechanism for reorganising society but also a means for the salvation of souls.

He did not imagine, nor does he claim in *News from Nowhere*, that socialism will make men perfect, or that suffering and folly will cease; indeed, he goes out of his way to indicate some of the kinds of unhappiness that he thinks will still be possible. But he also insisted that in this world of "clear and transparent human relationships" all the problems of life would be encountered on a new and higher level and would be capable of solution. In his Utopia man has become free in every sense of the word—master of his environment and of himself.

"You must know that we of these generations are strong and healthy of body, and live easily; we pass our lives in reasonable strife with nature, exercising not one side of ourselves only, but all sides, taking the keenest pleasure in the life of the world. So it is a point of honour with us not to be self-centred, not to suppose that the world must cease because one man is sorry; therefore we should think it foolish, or if you will, criminal, to exaggerate these matters of sentiment and sensibility. . . . So we shake off these griefs in a way which perhaps the sentimentalists would think contemptible and unheroic, but which we think necessary and manly."

It is because Morris insisted on the human aspect that his book reaches such heights, but for that very reason it has often been

misunderstood. Refusing to allow himself to be drawn into secondary details about the machinery of production he has come to be regarded as a machine-wrecker, and a popular view of *News from Nowhere* is that it advocates a return to medieval methods in which everything is made by hand. Now it is true that Morris, with his extraordinary skill in and love of handicrafts does stress this side more than many other writers would have done, and I think that in *News from Nowhere* there is at times an embroidering and elaboration of this theme which may even upset the balance of the whole, nor must we forget that he was writing a tale and not a treatise. At the same time it is quite untrue that he was hostile to machinery as such: what he argues is what any socialist would argue, that under capitalism machinery is used not to benefit the working population but to exploit them. This is made clear over and over again, for example in *Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, written as a pamphlet for the Socialist League in 1885:

"Our epoch has invented machines which would have appeared wild dreams to the men of past ages, and of those machines we have as yet *made no use*.

"They are called 'labour-saving' machines—a commonly used phrase which implies what we expect of them; but we do not get what we expect. What they really do is to reduce the skilled labourer to the ranks of the unskilled, to increase the number of the 'reserve army of labour'—that is, to increase the precariousness of life among the workers and to intensify the labour of those who serve the machines (as slaves to their masters). All this they do by the way, while they pile up the profits of the employers of labour, or force them to expand those profits in a bitter commercial war with each other. In a true society these miracles of ingenuity would be for the first time used for minimising the amount of time spent in unattractive labour, which by their means might be so reduced as to be but a very light burden on each individual. All the more as these machines would most certainly be very much improved when it was no longer a question as to whether their improvement would 'pay' the individual, but rather whether it would benefit the community."

This view, which Morris held consistently, can be traced in *News from Nowhere* by anyone ready to read it without preconceived notions. In this Socialist England "all work which it

would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery." This does not now involve the concentration of population in vast industrial centres because "the great change in the use of mechanical force" makes this no longer necessary. "Why", they ask, "should people collect together to use power, when they can have it at the places where they live, or hard by, any two or three of them; or any one for the matter of that?" Many utopian writers, from More onward, have seen the division between town and country as a growing evil: Marx declared that it was one of the tasks of socialism to end this division: Morris is perhaps the first to suggest here the place which something comparable to the vast schemes for electrification now proceeding in the U.S.S.R. could have in all this, and there is a more genuinely scientific attitude in these scattered hints than in all the elaborations of Bellamy.

Morris saw this change in the use of mechanical force as a factor of the dialectic of history:

"This is how we stand. England was once a country of clearings among the woods and wastes, with a few towns interspersed, which were fortresses for the feudal army, markets for the folk, gathering places for the craftsmen. It then became a country of huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill kept, poverty-stricken farm, pillaged by the masters of the workshops. It is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty. For, indeed, we should be too much ashamed of ourselves if we allowed the making of goods, even on a large scale, to carry with it the appearance, even, of desolation and misery."

For the rest, he is content to admit frankly that such mechanical details were not his proper concern, as when he saw strings of 'force barges' plying on the Thames:

"I understood pretty well that these 'force vehicles' had taken the place of our old steam-power carrying; but I took good care not to ask any questions about them, as I knew well enough both that I should never be able to understand how they were worked, and that in attempting to do so I should betray myself,

or get into some complication impossible to explain; so I merely said, 'Yes, of course, I understand.'"

This whole question of machinery and the relation of town and country is important both as showing how far Morris is commonly misrepresented and how correctly he applied the principles of Marxism. His Marxism can be traced similarly in nearly every question with which he deals, but nowhere more clearly than in the famous chapter called *How the Change Came*, which describes the revolution by which capitalism was overthrown and socialism established.

Morris was surrounded on the one hand by Fabians, separating socialism from the class struggle by their belief in the gradual and piecemeal transformation of capitalism from within, and on the other by Anarchists who equally in practice abandoned the class struggle by treating the fight for socialism as a conspiracy in which the mass of the workers were to play at best a very secondary part. Though he made tactical errors enough, Morris always held the Marxist view that socialism could only come by the seizure of power by the working class, which is what he always meant by revolution. It is such a seizure of power which he describes in *News from Nowhere*, drawing on the experience of the preceding decade—the unemployed agitations, the free speech fight with Bloody Sunday (November 13th, 1887) as its climax, and the great strike wave of 1888 with its accompanying revitalisation of Trade Unionism.

Many details of this revolution, which Morris put in the year 1952, may now seem obsolete and improbable, but as a whole it convinces as no other imaginary account of a revolution does, and I think the total success comes largely from the way in which Morris used his experiences in the actual movement, just as the occasional false notes reflect the weakness and immaturity of that movement. The success comes, too, from the careful way in which he had studied socialism as the science of the class struggle. In his account this is evident, over and over again, when he shows how the workers develop in struggle from merely trade union consciousness, to a higher, political consciousness, in the part played by the precipitating incident of the massacre on Trafalgar Square, an incident which produced a qualitative change in the whole relation of forces, and in the way in which the workers in the course of the revolution throw up and perfect the necessary forms and

organisations of struggle. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is the understanding, incomplete no doubt by comparison with the later teachings of Lenin, but remarkable at this early date, of the need for a revolutionary Party:

"But now that the time called for immediate action, came forward the men capable of setting it on foot; and a vast network of workmen's associations grew up very speedily, whose avowed single object was the tiding over of the ship of state into a simple condition of Communism; and as they practically undertook also the management of the ordinary labour war, they soon became the mouthpiece and intermediary of the whole of the working classes."

On the character of the State, of law, of colonial oppression, he is equally clear, but his insight is nowhere keener than in the passage which makes use of the Marxist idea that the revolution is needed to transform the working class themselves and prepare them for socialism, no less than for the overthrow of capitalism:

"The sloth, the hopelessness, and, if I may say so, the cowardice of the last century, had given place to the eager, restless heroism of a declared revolutionary period. I will not say the people of that time foresaw the life we are leading now, but there was a general instinct amongst them towards the essential part of that life, and many men saw clearly beyond the desperate struggle of the day into the peace which it was to bring about. . . .

"The very conflict itself, in days when, as I told you, men of any strength of mind cast away all consideration for the ordinary business of life, developed the necessary talent amongst them. Indeed, from all I have read and heard, I doubt whether, without this seemingly dreadful civil war, the due talent for administration would have developed amongst the working men. Anyhow, it was there, and they soon got leaders far more than equal to the best men among the reactionaries."

After so many Utopias which are mere fantasy, or pedestrian guesswork, or a jumble of both, one which is scientific, in the sense that it is deduced from the present and from the existing relations of the classes, cannot but be of outstanding importance. But this would not be enough in itself to give *News from Nowhere* the position it now holds. This is rather due to its combination

of scientific method with the imagination of a great poet, so that it is not only the one Utopia in whose possibility we can believe, but the one in which we could wish to live. Morris put into it not only his political experiences but his whole knowledge of life, his love of mankind and of the natural world. Further, I think, his years in the Movement enabled him to identify himself with the people not only politically but imaginatively, so that in *News from Nowhere* are embodied the deep, undying, hopes and desires not of an individual only but of a nation. In the dialectical development of the English Utopia it forms the final synthesis.

We have seen how Utopia begins with the Land of Cokaygne—the serf's dream of a world of peace, leisure and abundance—and we saw, too, how the Cokaygne dream persisted as an almost secret tradition under the surface, while the main stream of utopian thought passed through other channels. The great literary utopias are the work of the learned, of philosophers and not seldom of prigs, reflecting indeed historical development but only indirectly and in a distorted form the struggles and hopes of the people. With Morris the two streams flow together again, not just because he was a man of genius, but because he had mastered, imaginatively and intellectually the philosophy of the working class. One small example may illustrate this.

Solemn critics have blamed Morris because throughout the whole of his visit to the future the sun is shining, "whereas", they say, "we know that in England it always rains and would do so under any social system." Such a criticism can only be made because they miss the point that the England of *News from Nowhere* is the Land of Cokaygne, and in Cokaygne you may have whatever weather you please. The unknown poets who made the many variants of Cokaygne were expressing symbolically the belief that man can become the master instead of the slave of his environment, and Morris, identifying himself with them, uses naturally, and perhaps unconsciously, the same ancient symbol to express one of the most important truths of socialism.

It is this synthesis of the most ancient with the most modern wisdom, of the intellect with the imagination, of revolutionary struggle with a simple love of the earth which gives *News from Nowhere* its unique literary quality. It is the only Utopia which stirs the emotions as a whole: More can move us by his account of enclosures but not by his account of Utopia: Swift can make us share his anger and pity his sufferings, but we could not endure

the life of his Houyhnhnms: Morris can carry us with him throughout. We feel the stir and wonder of the awakening into a transformed London, the joy and simplicity of the new life there, the stress and ferment of the revolutionary years, the glory of an England rescued and cleansed from the filth and degradation of capitalism.

At every point Morris recasts his own experiences into the utopian stuff, and never more completely than in the magical, leisurely journey up the Thames with which the book ends. It was a journey he had often made himself, and as he describes this imaginary voyage we know how at every point of his real voyages he had in thought stripped away the vulgarities and desecrations of bourgeois profit-seeking and bourgeois pleasures. Through his eyes we see Hampton, Reading, Windsor, Oxford, not as they are, or even as they were in 1890, but as he had often longed for them to be. At the end of the voyage stood his beloved house at Kelmscott, the house which he could never entirely enjoy because he could never forget that it formed part of the suffering world, but which the world could equally never entirely spoil for him, because it was first of all his exceptional capacity for happiness which had made him a socialist. The June before he wrote *News from Nowhere* he had rejoiced at Kelmscott in a record hayseal:

"Haymaking is going on like a house afire; I should think such a haytime has seldom been; heavy crops and wonderful weather to get it in. For the rest the country is one big nosegay, the scents wonderful, really that is the word; the life of us holiday-makers luxurious to the extent of making us feel wicked, at least in the old sense of bewitched."

All this appears transformed in the masterly last chapters of *News from Nowhere*: the record hay crop, the long, hot June days, the ancient, scented house, no longer an oasis amid the horrors of the world of commercialism, but gaining a new dignity and beauty from its use and surroundings, the delight at being able to enjoy all this without a lurking sense of guilt (though Morris had surely earned the right to enjoy if ever a man did), and, finally, the sense of bewitchment. At Kelmscott Morris was at the end of his journey in time, he entered it like a ghost from the past, aware that this imagined happiness was not for him, that he and his new-found companions, more radiantly alive at that moment than the people of the real world, were divided by a gulf across

which he and they could peer and call, but which prevented further contact. Drop by drop the joy and beauty of the future life slip through his fingers, his hold relaxes, he turns away to meet a representative of the past to which he must now return:

"It was a man who looked old but whom I knew from habit, now half-forgotten, was really not much more than fifty (was in fact of Morris' own age). His face was rugged, and grimed rather than dirty; his eyes dull and bleared, his body bent, his calves thin and spindly, his feet dragging and limping. His clothing was a mixture of dirt and rags long over-familiar to me. As I passed him he touched his hat with some goodwill and courtesy, and much servility."

It is a moment of extraordinary poignancy, but it is not the end. The new world fades, its time is not yet, but Morris understood, and has the power to convince us, that what he has imagined is in essentials real, that it is there for us to find and that the time is coming in which we shall find it. Over three hundred years earlier More had ended *his* account of a communist society sadly, with the realisation that "many things be in the Utopian weale publique, whiche in our cities I may rather wishe for than hope after." More wrote without hope because he wrote alone: Morris wrote out of the fullness of his life, out of the experiences of the struggle for socialism and his fellowship with others in that struggle, and his conclusion was therefore very different:

"Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream."

### 3. *Laying the Spectre*

The Utopias of Bellamy and of Morris are the outstanding but by no means the only ones to concern themselves with socialism during the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth. Indeed, it became increasingly obvious that socialism was the only topic with which utopian writers could concern themselves if they were to discuss real problems at all, since socialism had now clearly established itself both as the antithesis and the logical historical successor of capitalism. Where is capitalist society going? Is the establishment of socialism practically possible? If so, is it desirable? If not, can it be prevented? And, finally, what would life under socialism be like? Such were the questions under debate.



We have seen how Bellamy and Morris answered them in their different ways, and, as the debate progressed a great fear entered the hearts of the bourgeoisie. This fear had, in a sense, always existed, but as the Paris Commune was followed by the growth of a world Trade Union movement, by the advance of mass Socialist Parties in many countries, by the Russian Revolution of 1905, by increasingly severe crises accompanied by large-scale unemployment, the fear steadily grew. And at the same time the middle classes were alarmed at the growth of monopoly, both as a menace in itself and as leading to counter-organisation on the part of the workers. As these workers more and more turned to socialism as the way out of their troubles, the capitalists became a prey to secret doubts as to the eternity of their order, began to feel that the world could perhaps exist without them and that before long it would certainly try.

The very popularity of *Looking Backward* and *News from Nowhere* was a menace and a challenge: these books were having a serious effect and must be answered. And answered they were, after a fashion, though the answers were ineffective and have passed today to the rubbish heaps of literature. Who, for example, has read, or even heard of, *Mr. East's Experiences*, or of *My Afterdream*? Finally, since the advance of socialism was international, and Bellamy's and Morris' utopias had been translated into a number of foreign languages and widely read, the debate assumes a more international character and in this Section we shall have to consider not only English books but books from the U.S.A., Germany and Austria as well.

*Mr. East's Experiences in Mr. Bellamy's World*, by Conrad Wilbrandt, was a German book which appeared in translation in New York in 1891. It is a heavy and aridly argumentative Teutonic work, full of the jargon of academic political economy. Its chief positive conclusions seem to be that revolution is the result of tariffs and that if war destroys its important foreign markets the socialist state must collapse since it has no capital (!).

The fact that such a reply should have appeared in a foreign country so soon after the publication of *Looking Backward* is impressive evidence of its effectiveness: no less impressive is the fact that as late as 1900 it was still found to require an answer, and it was in that year that *My Afterdream. A Sequel to the Late Mr. Bellamy's Looking Backward* was published in London. In it Bellamy's hero, Julian West, is made to declare that he has

matters to add to what he told Mr. Bellamy, and it is an altogether livelier affair than either Wilbrandt's or Bellamy's own book. The main arguments are not convincing but there are some telling strokes at the expense of Bellamy's solemn elaboration of mechanical detail, as in the picture of the dangers and difficulties of moving along streets filled with the countless pneumatic tubes of all sizes necessary to carry goods from the national warehouses to every house.

Typical is the *reductio ad absurdum* of his argument on the automatic self-regulation of the hours of labour in the various trades. 'West' explains that the difficulty of procuring undertakers was so great that their working day had had to be reduced to five minutes, so that to carry out a funeral needed 4,362 assistants working in relays. In an attempt to counter this, a Cock Robin School had been set up, where the boys practised mock funerals with the gigantic model of a robin.

"The pupils are selected from those lads who show unusual signs of tender-heartedness; and the idea is that by accustoming them from early years to practise the rites of sepulture, in future there will be a larger number of volunteers for the profession, with the necessary result of an increase in the hours of labour, and this will, of course, effect a great saving for the community."

The profession of artist, on the contrary, was so much desired that here a full eight hour day was insisted on, and the artist constantly tormented by inspectors.

'Julian West's' final discomfiture came when he was given the task of cleaning sewers, and when he discovered that Edith Leete (who had appeared to be a 'lady') worked in a laundry. His not very startling conclusion is that

"it was not, I determined, reconstruction on new lines that the world needed: it was the creation of a higher ideal among the toiling masses."

He does not say if he regards high ideals as unnecessary for the upper classes or whether he thinks they are already sufficiently provided.

Neither of these books has the slightest value as a serious criticism of socialism, but both are to a certain extent valid as against the bureaucratic distortions and the rigidly mechanical equalitarianism of Bellamy's Utopia, that is to say, of the most

markedly non-Marxist aspects of his work. In this sense they illustrate the truth of Morris' warning about the dangerous tendencies in *Looking Backward*.

Apart from these direct replies to Bellamy, the period saw at least four anti-socialist Utopias. The earliest of these is *Across the Zodiac* by Percy Greg, published in London in 1880. Greg, a Lancashire journalist, is described by the *Dictionary of National Biography* as

"in youth a secularist, in middle life a spiritualist, in later years a champion of feudalism and absolutism, and in particular an embittered adversary of the American Union."

He has evidently, what was rare in England at that date, at least a superficial knowledge of Marxism, and his attack follows a historical method which is interesting as foreshadowing more recent attempts to link communism and fascism. The hero of his story reaches Mars in a space boat to find there a world which is evidently what Greg fears our own may become in some centuries' time.

The creation of a Martial world state, with universal suffrage had opened a long period of class war, culminating in a proletarian revolution and universal communism. The results (naturally) were disastrous:

"The first and most visible effect of Communism was the utter disappearance of all perishable luxuries, of all food, clothing, furniture, better than that enjoyed by the poorest."

Dissatisfied groups gradually seceded to less fertile parts of the planet to set up a rival state, a long, intermittent war followed, ending with the destruction of communism and the establishment of a world totalitarian state. This state was more efficient than its communist rival, but, from Greg's point of view, scarcely more admirable.

It was based on private property, but its members had virtually no private life. The family had ceased to exist, marriage was by purchase and women were strictly confined to their homes and without rights of any kind. The new society was 'materialistic', atheism being a dogma and any doubts expressed about the infallibility of science likely to land the doubter in an asylum; it was authoritarian, with an absolute ruler, the *campetê*, arbitrarily selected, and all lower officials chosen on a kind of 'leader

principle', and it was brutally repressive, one feature being the systematic torture of prisoners.

At the time of being visited, however, the Martial state was being undermined from within by a secret society, religious rather than political, rejecting the official atheism and refusing to hand over its children to the state. No solution of the conflict was in sight, but Greg hints that the totalitarian state will ultimately be defeated. *Across the Zodiac*, old-fashioned in its details and in its pompous, inflated style has yet an oddly familiar ring: all the current clichés about communism, totalitarianism and the 'free world' can be seen taking shape: totalitarianism is the logical response to communism and both are criticised from a feudal-romantic standpoint in which much play is made with 'chivalry' and 'Christian values.'

Similar in some respects is a book published in America in 1890, which, fantastic as it is, had a considerable immediate success. This is *Caesar's Column*, by Ignatius Donnelly. Donnelly was born in Philadelphia in 1831, moved west, and settled early in Minnesota where he was Lieutenant Governor during the Civil War and later a Grangeite and a leading figure in the Populist Party. He was one of the characteristic middle-class radicals of the frontier—muddled, eccentric (a believer in both the Baconian theory and the historical existence of Atlantis), but shrewd, and a courageous and outspoken opponent of graft and monopoly.

Of the corruption of American politics he had ample experience, being a member, around 1889, of that Minnesota State Senate of which his biographer wrote:

"One Senator charged, and offered to prove, that 25,000 dollars had been paid to another Senator for his vote; and that dignified body did not even think it worth while to investigate the charge. In the House, thirty members were said to have banded themselves together, and one man sold their votes, on all important questions, as Mr. Donnelly said, 'like a bunch of asparagus'. An universal outcry went up from the people that it was the worst legislature that had ever been known in the world."

It was to these experiences, and others like them, that *Caesar's Column* owes its existence. In it Gabriel Welstein, an extremely innocent young man of Swiss origin, comes to New York from East Africa in the year 1988. He finds that monopoly capitalism

has developed into a system of unparalleled corruption. A series of dramatic chapters describe the vices and selfishness of the rich, the brutalisation and growing revolt of the masses, and the final wild outbreak, part of a world-wide insurrection, in which the workers destroy capitalism and its civilisation under the leadership of a secret, and highly sinister, 'Brotherhood of Destruction'. This revolt has neither plan nor purpose, but leads only to an orgy of massacre and riot, culminating in the episode from which the book takes its title.

So many corpses litter the streets of New York that the leader of the revolt, Caesar Lomellini, decides to dispose of them in a vast column, built by laying the bodies out in successive layers and covering each layer with concrete. For Caesar's Column Welstein composes an inscription that is the epitaph of a civilisation:

"THIS GREAT MONUMENT IS ERECTED BY CAESAR LOMELLINI, COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF DESTRUCTION, IN COMMEMORATION OF THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF MODERN CIVILISATION.

"It is composed of the bodies of a quarter of a million of human beings, who were once the rulers, or the instruments of the rulers, of this mighty, but, alas! this ruined city.

"They were dominated by leaders who were altogether evil.

"They corrupted the courts, the juries, the newspapers, the legislatures, the congresses, the ballot-boxes and the hearts and souls of the people.

"They formed gigantic combinations to plunder the poor; to make the miserable more miserable; to take from those who had least and give it to those who had most.

"They used the machinery of free government to effect oppression; they made liberty a mockery, and its traditions a jest; they drove justice from the land and installed cruelty, ignorance, despair and vice in its place.

"Their hearts were harder than the nether mill-stone; they degraded humanity and outraged God.

"At length indignation stirred in the vasty courts of heaven; and overburdened human nature rose in universal revolt on earth.

"By the very instruments which their own wickedness had created they perished, and here they lie, sepulchred in stone. . . .

"Should civilisation ever revive on earth, let the human race come hither and look upon this towering shaft, and learn to restrain selfishness and live righteously. From this ghastly pile let it derive the great lesson, that no earthly government can endure which is not built on mercy, justice, truth and love."

Horried by all that he had seen, by the dead civilisation no less than by the judgment that had overwhelmed it, Welstein flies back to his remote African home, one of few places unvisited by the catastrophe, there to set about the construction of a republic on lines by which, he hopes, the danger of class struggle may be avoided. It is the old dream of the middle-class radical, free enterprise without exploitation, very much, indeed, what Donnelly and his fellow Populists wanted in America. There is no mistaking the earnestness of his intentions; but between hatred of monopoly capitalism and fear and misunderstanding of the working class, his helplessness is equally obvious.

Another Utopia which also promised free enterprise without exploitation in an East African setting was *Freeland. A Social Anticipation*, published in 1890 by the Austrian economist Theodor Hertzka. This may seem a less remarkable coincidence when we remember that the recent explorations of East Africa had revealed large tracts with a climate suitable for European settlement, and that the area was just on the point of being opened up. Both books, in fact, were written in the very years in which the British East Africa Co. was preparing the way for the formal annexation of the whole region. Hertzka's Utopia is unique at least in showing us, instead of a society as a going concern, the foundation of such a society, and he shared with Cabet the experience of witnessing attempts to transform his fiction into reality. The results, however, were even less substantial than in the case of the Icarians.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the establishment of Freeland is told with the most painstaking detail, down to the furnishing of each member of the advance party "with six complete sets of underclothing of light elastic woollen material—the so-called Jäger clothing". After such a start it can be imagined how brilliantly all obstacles to the setting up of the Utopian state are overcome.

The basis of this state is the common ownership of the land combined with free enterprise in production. Any individual or

<sup>1</sup> See p. 134.

group is provided with capital, free of interest, for approved enterprises, the capital to be repaid by instalments. Most production is in fact carried on by co-operative associations, the products being shared according to the work done. Women, children and those unable to work are provided for. Freeland is the utopia of enlightened self-interest:

"The organisation was in truth mainly a mode of removing all those hindrances that stand in the way of wise self-interest. So much the more was it necessary to give right direction to the sovereign will, and offer to self-interest every assistance towards obtaining a correct and speedy grasp of its real advantage."

In such a society it is gratifying rather than surprising to learn that neither communism nor nihilism, those two bogeys of the day, could find any foothold.

Most of what has been said about the replies to *Looking Backward* applies equally to Eugene Richter's *Pictures of the Socialistic Future* (1893). Richter draws a picture of socialism manifestly absurd and contradicted by everything that has happened since 1917. His Socialist Government confiscates personal property and small savings, and abolishes money. Children are taken from their parents, old people forced into homes. Everything, down to the smallest one-man enterprise, is nationalised overnight. After all this it is not difficult to proceed to the assumption, which can now be demonstrated in practice to be incorrect, that socialism will lead to such a fall in production that the workers will receive less than they received under capitalism. Once more we have the familiar picture of the police state, with bureaucratic follies and extortions multiplied till the overdriven workers revolt. And once more it may be observed that such justification as it may have is given to Richter's picture by the lapses into opportunism, the undialectical thinking, which were already appearing in German Social Democracy as well as in that of other countries.

A more interesting work on similar lines is Ernest Bramah's *What might Have Been, The Story of a Social War* (1907), reprinted in 1909 under its more familiar title, *The Secret of the League*. At the General Election of 1906 a block of some forty Labour and Trade Union Members had been returned to Parliament, to the alarm of those to whom that body had always been regarded as the

exclusive preserve of the upper and middle classes. Bramah's book is an expression of that alarm, and when it opens, about 1918, Britain is in the middle of another election in the course of which a 'moderate' Labour Government is replaced by a socialist one. To Bramah the process was beautifully simple:

"The Labour party had come into power by pointing out to voters of the working class that its members were their brothers, and promising them a good deal of property belonging to other people and a good many privileges which they vehemently denounced in every other class. When in power they had thrown open the doors of election to one and all. The Socialist party had come into power by pointing out to voters of the working class that its members were even more their brothers, and promising them a still larger share of other people's property (some, indeed, belonging to the more prosperous of the Labour members then in office) and still greater privileges."

The new Socialist Government, in spite of its name, made no attempt at any fundamental change, but contented itself with imposing ever increasing taxation to finance a 'Welfare State' on the basis of a continued capitalist productive system. The result was a maximum irritation of the upper, and especially of the middle classes, with the minimum of benefit to the workers:

"It was almost the Millennium. The only drawback was that, with all this affluence around, the working man found himself very much in the condition of a financial Ancient Mariner. There was a great deal of money being spent on him, and for him, but he never had any in his pocket. And the working man's wife was even worse off."

Bramah, obviously, had no conception that socialism could mean anything else than mindless plundering, and his book is both stupid and ignorant, filled with an undisguised hatred of, and contempt for the working class. What gives it a certain interest is, first, its direct reflection of the rise of the Labour Party, and, second, its quite unintended demonstration of the futility of trying to build a welfare state while still leaving the capitalist class in undisturbed possession of the power it draws from its ownership of the means of production.

His story proceeds to describe the increasing difficulties of the Government and its defeat by the 'Unity League', a semi-secret



organisation of all the population outside the manual workers. The method of the League was to proclaim suddenly, on behalf of all its members, a boycott on the use of coal: at the same time it had secured, by a conspiracy with the foreign governments concerned, the placing of an embargo on the import of British coal by its normal chief buyers—all of course with the most patriotic motives and sentiments. In the end, after a *coup d'état*, the League seized power and proceeded to establish a Parliamentary dictatorship by the simple means of disfranchising virtually the whole of the working class, a step which Bramah approves with the Ireton-like argument that in running a business the shareholders vote according to the amount of their capital.

The same year, 1907, saw also the publication of a final contribution to the great debate, this time on the socialist side. Jack London's *The Iron Heel* has long been accepted as a classic in the working class movement, and I do not propose to discuss it here in any detail. It is valuable because London, despite many theoretical weaknesses, writes with power and imagination about the immediate future from the standpoint of Marxism. It was this which gave him his insight into the nature of the enemy, his understanding of the ferocity and unscrupulousness of the ruling class and the lengths to which they will go rather than give up their power. This insight helped him to foresee the rise of fascism, and, in particular, as we can now realise better than ever before, the new kind of fascism that is threatening to arise out of American imperialism. Above all, he saw that fascism is not a mysterious disease, but something arising naturally in certain conditions from declining capitalism.

In one sense *The Iron Heel* was already becoming 'old-fashioned' even when it appeared, for it still takes for granted that socialism is a revolutionary creed, at a time when all over Europe and America reactionary leaders were trying to disguise this awkward fact. By 1907 the new epoch of imperialism was already well advanced, and with it went the growth of opportunism in the workers' movement. So, also, the nature of utopian speculation changed correspondingly, and, if the discussion continued to revolve around socialism, it was socialism with a difference. Already, in terms of utopian development, we have slipped over into the period in which H. G. Wells is the dominating figure, and it is to Wells and what he stood for, and to the opposition which his ideas aroused, that we must now turn.

## YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW

I can say this of Naseby, That when I saw the Enemy draw up and march in gallant order towards us, and we a company of poor ignorant men, to seek how to order our battle: the General having commanded me to order all the Horse, I could not (riding alone about my business), but smile out to God in praises, in assurance of victory, because God would, by things that are not, bring to naught things that are. Of which I had great assurance; and God did it.

CROMWELL: *Letters*.

"To-morrow," said Gumbriel at last meditatively.

"To-morrow," Mrs. Vivcash interrupted him, "will be as awful as to-day."

ALDOUS HUXLEY: *Antic Hay*.

1. *Cellophane Utopia*

THE writers we have had to consider so far have contented themselves with a single Utopia, or if not, have at least, like Swift, confined their Utopias within a single volume: this cannot, alas, be said of H. G. Wells. Of the hundred or so books with which he is credited a considerable proportion are utopias, or have at least a partly utopian character; so many are they, indeed, that it would be impossible to discuss them all. The main works which I should like to put in here as evidence are *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899, republished 1921 as *The Sleeper Awakes*), *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), *A Modern Utopia* (1905), *The New Machiavelli* (1911), *The World Set Free* (1914), *Men Like Gods* (1922), *Things to Come* (1935, film treatment of *The Shape of Things to Come*, 1933) and *Mind-at the End of Its Tether* (1945). These books may be taken as a fair sample of the work of forty years.

The very fact that he found it necessary to write so many utopias suggests that Wells was never able to convince himself with any of them, and this was clearly the case. He spent his life in a permanent state of having second thoughts about everything, of mistaking prejudices for principles, and, lacking any scientific understanding of society, he was for ever running up blind alleys, isolating, and so distorting, one facet or another, giving a 'socialist', 'progressive', gloss to some scrap of bourgeois pseudo-science—neo-malthusianism, Keynesian full-employment economics, Jungian-type psychology and the like. He made a whole series of guesses about the future, each guess ostensibly

scientific, and each, by its difference from all the others, exposing its own pretensions to science.

To explore this jungle of empiricism would need, not a single chapter, but a whole book, and I do not intend to attempt any such exploration. Instead I shall adopt a method rather different from that followed hitherto, and attempt to discuss this series of books as a whole, to ignore the differences and concentrate on the main common features running through them, on what seems to be permanent and really characteristic in Wells' thought. I shall therefore not attempt to deal with the separate utopias in their details or their fictional framework, though it is important to remember that Wells, more than almost any of the writers discussed in this book, was a professional novelist with a high level of technical competence.

Wells came to intellectual maturity, and his writings took as definite a shape as they were capable of, in the period of the growth of imperialism, and, finally, in that short first stage of imperialism before 1914 opened the general crisis of capitalism. That is to say, he was born in the Victorian world of muddle, of irrational survivals, of petty competition and small-shopkeeper economy, and grew into a world in which these things became more and more obviously survivals and anomalies. He regarded himself, intermittently, as a socialist, but his socialism derived from Saint-Simon, Comte and Bellamy rather than from Marx and Morris. He could see the faults of the old capitalism, and naïvely supposed that he could persuade it to transform itself, shedding its absurdities and becoming clear, sweet and reasonable. What was at fault was not so much capitalism as the imperfections that had accompanied its early stages and the feudal survivals from which it had not entirely freed itself.

The hero of *The New Machiavelli* declared, the period being around 1902:

“‘Muddle,’ said I, ‘is the enemy.’ That remains my belief to this day. Clearness and order, light and foresight, these things I know for Good. It was muddle had just given us the still freshly painful disasters and humiliations of the war, muddle that gives us the visibly sprawling disorder of our cities and industrial country-side, muddle that gives us the waste of life, the limitations, wretchedness and unemployment of the poor. Muddle! I remember myself quoting Kipling—

“‘All along o’ dirtiness, all along o’ mess,  
All along o’ doin’ things rather-more-or-less.’

“‘We build the state’, we said over and over again. ‘That is what we are for—servants of the new reorganisation!’”

And, a little later:

“I had one constant desire ruling my thoughts. I meant to leave England and the empire better ordered than I found it, to organise and discipline, to build up a constructive and controlling State out of my world’s confusions.”

So socialism was basically a matter of helping capitalism to emerge from its infantile mess, and at the end of the road shone the Wellsian Utopia, a sterilised, hygienic, cellophane world where everything appeared to have been just polished by all the most advertised brands.

In this he was not alone. Like all the Fabians, he saw socialism not as a new category but as a form of social hygiene: the world needed tidying. One of the favourite Fabian illustrations of the waste and absurdity of capitalism was the fact that six milkmen might often be observed in one street when the job could be done just as efficiently by one. No doubt this is true, and no doubt socialism would end such waste, but what the Fabians failed to see was that monopoly could equally easily end it without either housewife or milkman being a penny the better, and, very possibly, being considerably the worse, for the change. Chesterton was not exaggerating too wildly when he wrote of

“Mr. Sidney Webb, also, who said that the future would see a continuously increasing order and neatness in the life of the people, and his poor friend Fipps, who went mad and ran about the country with an axe, hacking branches off the trees whenever there were not the same number on both sides.”

To Wells, to all the Fabians, there was something terribly impressive about imperialism, about its power, its smoothness, its order, its science, its ideal of a world subdued and organised, its headlong technical advance. If only the Kings of this new world would call in the Philosophers. . . . Failing that, the Philosophers must somehow attach themselves to the Kings, must permeate and persuade, must get their hands on the controls when the Kings were looking another way—or—at the least—write innumerable essays and tracts showing how it might be done. It

was as a pamphleteer rather than as a permeator that Wells excelled.

If he broke with the Fabian Society it was not because he disagreed with their fundamental attitude. He was a Fabian who wanted to furnish Fabianism with a fervour, an exciting quality, an appearance of imaginative depth which it was not in its nature to possess. What he succeeded in doing was to vulgarise it. The Fabian belief in socialism as a form of hygiene sits ill with sentiment and emotional uplift, and Wells is always at a loss when he tries to explain what his Utopias are for. Like imperialism they have no purpose greater than themselves, and it is characteristic that just as imperialism is bent on subduing the whole world, the super-imperialist Utopias of Wells can offer nothing better than the conquest of the universe. The Samurai of *A Modern Utopia* recalls how, in a moment of supreme exaltation:

"I remember that one night I sat up and told the rascal stars very earnestly how they should not escape me in the end."

There is hardly a single one of the Wellsian Utopias in which the theme of inter-planetary or inter-stellar navigation does not appear in some form or another.

While, on the face of things, imperialism certainly was impressive, at least till 1914, the working-class movement was anything but impressive to men like the Fabians. It was raw, confused, sectarian, emotional and, in short, a company of poor ignorant men. None of them had the Cromwellian eye to see that with this poor company lay the future and the bringing to naught of the things that are, which is the reason why, though many of them were far cleverer people than Cromwell, they won no victories. Wells had his full share in this lack of faith. In *The New Machiavelli* he expresses it in his picture of Chris Robinson (Keir Hardie?), the working-class socialist leader:

"I looked at Chris Robinson, bright-eyed and his hair a little ruffled and his whole being rhetorical, and measured him against the huge machine of government muddled and mysterious. Oh! but I was perplexed!"

Clearly socialism could not come from the rough, ignorant, narrow workers, led by such men as Robinson. They were incapable of appreciating the logical beauty of the Wellsian Utopia, which had no place for them or for anything they might become.

Frederick Barnet in *The World Set Free* meets unemployed workers and finds them unresponsive:

"I tried to talk to these discontented men, but it was hard for them to see things as I saw them. When I talked of patience and the larger scheme, they answered, 'But we shall all be dead'—and I could not make them see, what is so simple to my own mind, that that did not affect the question. Men who think in lifetimes are of no use to statesmanship."

In *The World Set Free* the Utopian world state is finally established, after a devastating war, by an international conference of Kings and Presidents, with a few scientists and writers thrown in for good measure.

This certainty that however Utopia may be realised it will not be through the working class, colours Wells' whole outlook from his first books to his last. Not only are the workers rejected as a positive historical force, but there is an active, if often half-suppressed, fear and hatred which assumes curious forms. When workers appear in his books they are uncouth, stunted and often deformed, as in the extreme case of the Selenites in *The First Men in the Moon*. They live underground, away from the sun and air, as in *The Time Machine* or *When the Sleeper Wakes*. Often the same feeling is expressed symbolically as in the famous metaphor in *Kipps* of men crawling along a drainpipe till they die. In one of the later Utopias, *Men Like Gods*, a random sample of English people are projected into a Utopian planet by some scientific hocus-pocus, and in this sample the working class is 'represented' by two utterly demoralised chauffeurs who are even more out of place there than the selection of ruling class types who accompany them. Wells might argue that their behaviour is quite in keeping with probability—what he has to explain is *why* he selected just these to stand for the working class.

Along with this fear and hatred went a dislike of Marx and Marxism. Wells, who had never troubled to understand Marxism, seldom missed an opportunity to sneer at it. To one who saw socialism largely as a matter of one milkman instead of six, Marx's conception of history, his analysis of the class structure of society, his belief that socialism meant the victory of the working class, could not be acceptable. All his life Wells spent in a vain effort to concoct some rival theory which would hold water. Since, as we have said, his socialism was not a new category but

merely a more effective form, it was possible to imagine it combined or diluted with all sorts of non-socialist forms. *A Modern Utopia*, which is his most classical utopian essay, and seems to embody most nearly what he regarded as practical for the fairly near future, describes a mixed economy based largely on the ideas of Hertzka's *Freeland*, an economy in which private enterprise still operates in a framework of the public ownership of land transport and essential services. With this went machinery for ensuring full employment by starting schemes of public works to absorb surplus labour.

His rejection of Marx forced him more and more to turn away from reality. In place of the clear concept of class, based on production relationships, Wells invented, with some help from Jung, a classification based on psychological types. In *A Modern Utopia* the people are divided into four "classes of mind", the Poetic, the Kinetic, the Dull and the Base. Much later in *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1932) a somewhat different division is made, into "persona"—the Peasant, the Autocrat and the Priest. Since these classifications are completely unrelated to actual life, it is perfectly easy to invent two, or, indeed, any number of them, all equally plausible and all equally meaningless.

Further, these classifications are static, they claim to describe something found equally in every kind of society and so leave no room for the conception of change arising from the self-movement and contradictions of actual society. Yet Wells knew that the world does change, more, he really believed in the necessity and possibility of Utopia. And since Utopia could not be, as it was for Morris, the outcome of the workers' struggle, he was driven to endless shifts to explain convincingly *How the Change Came*. This he did in all sorts of ways. In *The World Set Free* it was due to Princes whose eyes had been opened. In *Things to Come* to an open conspiracy, 'Wings across the World', of airmen and technicians. In *A Modern Utopia* to another open conspiracy of a self-selected aristocracy, the Samurai, 'priests' in the Wellsian sense, determined to serve the world whether it would or no. In *Men Like Gods* the process is envisaged more vaguely as a general and gradual enlightenment:

"The impression given Mr. Barnstaple was not of one of those violent changes which our world has learned to call revolutions, but of an increase of light, a dawn of new ideas,

in which the things of the old order went on for a time with diminishing vigour until people began as a matter of common sense to do the new things in the place of the old."

There is, in fact, a different road to every Wellsian Utopia, but all have this in common, that Utopia is imposed on the brutal and reluctant masses by an enlightened minority. Wells never decided how this minority was to be found or of whom it should consist. Sometimes it was a lay-priesthood, the Samurai, drawn from the more educated classes and bound by a 'rule' in the mediæval sense of that word. At other times he looked for it among the men of science, at others among the engineers, technicians and administrators that were being created in such numbers to serve monopoly capital. And, in his later years, he seemed more and more to look for saviours from among the most efficient and 'enlightened' capitalists, the Fords and Rockefellers, the Morrisises and the Monds. He shared to the full the illusions common during the great American boom of the late 'twenties and learnt little or nothing from the slump of 1929.

His distrust of the workers is linked closely with his dislike of democracy: however much his Utopias differ they are all anti-democratic. Having established their Utopia, the minority of the elect continue to run it autocratically if benevolently. At no point is there any suggestion that the gap between minority and mass could ever be closed, and this is natural, since the gap reflects not class differences which must end in a classless society, but arbitrary and absolute differences of psychological type, inborn and everlasting.

Wells accepted Plato's concept of a specialised society, in which everyone does perfectly the one job for which he is fitted by nature and training, a society therefore of degree. In *The First Men in the Moon* this is carried to an extent which Wells perhaps did not consciously approve:

"In the moon every citizen knows his place. He is born to that place, and the elaborate discipline of training and education and surgery he undergoes fits him at last so completely to it that he has neither ideas nor organs for any purpose beyond it. 'Why should he?' Phi-oo would ask. If, for example, a Selenite is destined to be a mathematician, his teachers and trainers set out at once to that end. They check any incipient disposition to other pursuits, they encourage his mathematical



bias with a perfect psychological skill. His brain grows, or at least the mathematical faculties of his brain grow, and the rest of him only so much as is necessary to sustain this essential part of him."

Whether or not we are invited to admire the Selenites, they merely carry to its logical extreme what is implicit in all Wells' thought, and it is a logic which leads us to the kind of world shown in Huxley's *Brave New World* or Joseph O'Neill's *Land Under England*.

In this specialist society, government is also a job for the specialist. Wells, like Plato, thought that the cobbler should stick to his last and surrender himself to those who know best what is good for him, to the Samurai and the Open Conspirators. Attempts have been made to suggest a parallel between the Samurai and the Communist Party: such attempts ignore the essential difference that the Samurai separate themselves from the masses on which they impose their will, while the Communists remain a part of the class which they lead. This truth was expressed vividly by Stalin when he compared a Communist Party with the mythical Greek giant Antaeus, whose strength flowed away from him the moment he lost contact with the earth:

"I think that the Bolsheviks remind us of the hero of Greek mythology, Antaeus. They, like Antaeus, are strong because they maintain their connection with their mother, the masses, who gave birth to them, suckled them and reared them. And as long as they maintain connection with their mother, with the people, they have every chance of remaining invincible."

The specialised Wellsian Utopia is the antithesis of socialism, which regards man as a flexible and many-sided being, capable of a full understanding of his world and of controlling it. Wells, accepting imperialism as a basis, only wished to humanise it: imperialism makes man into an ever more specialised *instrument*, and such he remains in Wells' Utopias, however beautifully contrived and finely tempered he may be allowed to become.

Wells, in any case, placed very definite limits upon what man might become. We have seen how Morris in *News from Nowhere* chose to emphasise the transformation of human nature: in Wells' Utopias everything changes except man—from *A Modern Utopia* to *Things to Come* men are surrounded by every kind of mechanical

marvel and continue to talk and act like turnips. For him there is something permanent and unalterable in human nature, and the unchanging part of man is the essential part. Utopian man, he says,

“would have different habits, different traditions, different knowledge, different ideas, different clothing and different appliances, but, *except for all that* (my italics) he would be the same man. We very distinctly provided at the outset that the modern Utopia must have people inherently the same as those in the world.”

and

“whatever we do, man will remain a competitive creature.”

Consequently,

“it is our business to ask what Utopia will do with its drunkards and men of vicious mind, its cruel and furtive souls, its stupid people, too stupid to be of use to the community, its lumpish, unteachable and unimaginative people? And what will it do with the man who is ‘poor’ all round, the rather spiritless, rather incompetent low-grade man who on earth sits in the den of the sweeter, tramps the streets under the banner of the unemployed, or trembles—in another man’s cast-off clothing, and with an infinity of hat touching—on the verge of rural unemployment?”

In his Utopia, it would appear, such people are to be produced in as great, or almost as great, numbers as in our own world, and Wells, regarding this as inevitable, has no solution except bourgeois eugenics. In *A Modern Utopia* he grumbles like any Dean Inge about the way the poor breed, and a whole machinery exists to prevent the ‘inferior types’ from reproducing themselves:

“here one may insist that Utopia will control the increase of its population. Without the determination and ability to limit that increase, as well as to stimulate it whenever it is necessary, no Utopia is possible. That was clearly demonstrated by Malthus for all time.”

Wells was a believer in progress, for a whole generation he was regarded in England as the leading apostle of progress, his books are crammed full of the surprising things which he thought might happen to us—yet at the bottom things remain the same,

because the progress is purely quantitative, something external to man. Beyond that he could not go and that is why his books, though some of them had a certain usefulness in their day, have a thinness, a vulgarity and a vagueness which reveals itself at critical points in a cluster of generalities trailing off into a string of dots:

“Science is no longer our servant. We know it for something greater than our little individual selves. It is the awakening mind of the race, and in a little while—In a little while—I wish indeed I could watch for that little while, now that the curtain has risen. . . .”

For Wells the curtain was always rising but the play never began.

He could not see the play because the play was the struggle of classes, and to see it involved the recognition of the class struggle as the motive-force of historic change. He was born into an especially depressed section of the lower middle class: very early he rejected the outlook of that class, and his swift success as a writer carried him out of it economically on to the fringe of the ruling class. But he never lost one of its most marked peculiarities, the fear of the mass of the workers from which it feels itself separated by so narrow a gulf. This fear takes two forms, fear of slipping down into the ‘lower world’, and fear of an invasion from that world, an invasion of barbarians levelling all before them.

That fear remained with Wells all his life. He might pity the workers, he might want to brighten their lives, but he could never see them as anything but a destructive force which must be led and controlled and, if necessary, coerced. In that interesting early book, *When the Sleeper Wakes*, which has a curious and distorted reflection of the class struggle and in which the idea of revolution is not entirely rejected, the workers are exploited and rebellious, but can only revolt under the leadership of a powerful section of the upper class, and the hero of the book, the Sleeper who wakes to find himself the owner of the earth, fights the battle of the workers in isolation as a champion coming to them from the outside. In none of his other books will they play any serious part whatsoever.

Below the crudely confident belief in progress, in the capacity of imperialism to shed its defects and transform the world into Utopia, there lay always a deeper pessimism. The Samurai were

long in coming, perhaps the Samurai might not come in time. The world, which Wells always saw as a class of difficult small boys to be lectured at and instructed, grew less and less attentive. Even at the beginning these doubts appear unexpectedly, as in *A Modern Utopia* when the hero admits:

"At present we seem to have lost heart altogether, and now there are no new religions, no new orders, no new cults—no beginnings any more."

This was in 1905, at the moment when, in Russia, a new revolutionary epoch was already opening.

But this was not the kind of beginning for which Wells was looking, or was, indeed, capable of seeing, and the advance of socialism after 1917 and the growth of a world revolutionary movement did not comfort him. He grew more and more angry, more and more surprised that his good advice was never taken. In *Men Like Gods* Utopia is removed to a future so distant that it has virtually no relation to existing realities. He can discern no visible link between the present and the future in which, as an article of faith, he still professes belief.

In his very last book *Mind at the End of Its Tether* even this distant hope was abandoned:

"The end of everything we call life is close at hand and cannot be evaded."

It seems a strange end to so many years of brisk and buoyant prophesying, yet the end is implicit in the beginning. Wells had many admirable qualities, courage, shrewdness, energy and even generosity when his prejudices were not touched, but with them all he turned his back upon the future, and not all his gifts could enable him to grow the eyes in the back of his head which would have been needed to enable him to see things as they really were. His obscure perception of what was happening found expression, perhaps, in a belief that to survive man must become something which he, Wells, could no longer recognise as man.

Perhaps the title of this last book should be *Fabianism at the End of Its Tether*, for Fabianism, inglorious as its history has been, is in a sense the last attempt to provide capitalism with a forward-looking body of ideas. After Wells there are not, and, I think, cannot be, any more Fabian Utopias, or any Utopias at all of a positive character. The form retains its popularity but its use is

negative, to convey satire or despair or the degeneration of certain types of intellectual in the last stage of capitalism. The positive answer to Wells was given first in 1917, and, in a different way, some twenty years later, when the two greatest Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb repudiated their whole past by calling their study of the U.S.S.R., *Soviet Communism: a New Civilisation*.

## 2. *The Machine-wreckers*

Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* opens in the dim, sub-Fabian England of 1984, an England in which everything seemed to have reached a full stop, an England which

"believed in a thing called Evolution. And it said 'All theoretic changes have ended in blood and ennui. If we change we must change slowly and safely, as the animals change. Natural revolutions are the only successful ones. There has been no conservative reaction in favour of tails.'

"And some things did change. Things that were not much thought of dropped out of sight. Things that had not often happened did not happen at all. Thus, for instance, the actual physical force ruling the country, the soldiers and police, grew smaller and smaller, and at last vanished almost to a point. The people could have swept the few remaining policemen away in ten minutes: they did not do so because they did not believe it would do them the least good. They had lost faith in revolutions.

"Democracy was dead; for no one minded the governing class governing. England was now practically a despotism, but not an hereditary one. Some one on the official class was made King. No one cared how: no one cared who. He was merely an universal secretary.

"In this manner it happened that everything in London was very quiet."

The whole world was drab, uniform and cosmopolitan: the methods of Fabianism had been successfully applied, but Chesterton did not believe that the result would be quite what they had expected, certainly it would not be the swift-moving, brightly polished Utopia of Wells: whatever might succeed, the Wellsian attempt to make Fabianism exciting must fail.

The King was, in fact, chosen by lot, and in 1984 the lot fell

upon one Auberon Quin, a youngish man who was then possibly the only humourist still living. As a vast public practical joke he issued a decree that all London boroughs were to take on the trimmings of the Middle Ages, provosts, heralds, town guards in splendid costumes armed with halberds, city gates, tocsin, curfew and the rest of it. In due time, also by lot, the Provostship of Notting Hill fell to Adam Wayne, a romantic who took the King's "Charter of the Cities" entirely seriously, and when the neighbouring boroughs wanted to drive an arterial road through Notting Hill, he stood upon the rights given him by the Charter and refused to let it pass. In the war that followed, Notting Hill triumphed against fantastic odds by a combination of luck and military genius. And in doing so, and because of the passions that the war aroused, the King's joke was transformed into a reality, not only for Wayne and the Notting Hillers, but also for their opponents. Life became colourful, romantic, and intensely local, and, though the dominance of Notting Hill was ended twenty years later in a great battle fought in Kensington Gardens, the effects of its victory and dominance remained.

Now all this is confused enough. On one level it is excellent fooling at the expense of Wells and the Fabians. On another, it is clear that Chesterton understood no more than they did what was really happening in the world. The England of his last chapters, after the victory of Notting Hill, has a superficial likeness to that of *News from Nowhere*: with this difference, that the likeness only touches the most ornamental parts of the superstructure. Chesterton, if he thought about the matter at all, thought that this could be changed arbitrarily at will without any change in the basis. It is not merely that the book is a fantasy: fantasy is, within limits, a perfectly justifiable literary form, but to be effective it must have a valid relation to reality, one must be able to say, granting these assumptions, whatever they may be, the rest follows logically. A world where *anything* may happen can have no value for us.

In Chesterton's books, even in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, which is the best of them, we often do feel this, because the thing which Chesterton wishes to happen is inherently impossible. He was a bourgeois radical who hated imperialism and fought it according to his powers, but always in the name of the past, inspired by the dream of a return to the small, the local and the peculiar. Wells had accepted imperialism, Chesterton ran away

from it, neither could grasp the dialectic of its transformation into socialism.

For Chesterton the result was that his opposition was un-directed and futile and very quickly petered out into a non-stop acrobatic turn. Yet his indignation was real enough, and in 1904, at the outset of his career as a writer, it comes over very clearly in the pages of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, giving it a positive power that few of his later books share. This indignation is given an appropriate form, a sharpness of expression, the vividness of something actually seen, by the genesis of the book. Chesterton tells us in his *Autobiography*, what is in any case obvious enough from the pages of the book itself, that it was based on the tales he liked to tell himself as a boy, walking among the streets of west London: it has all the boy's delight in the clear-cut and the uncompromising, and some of the richness of a tale long carried in the heart. It was the young Chesterton who was Adam Wayne planning the defence of Notting Hill.

At any rate, when he wanted a frame to hold his diatribe against imperialism, against the Fabianism which glorified it, and the cosmopolitanism which was its natural accompaniment, this was ready to his hand. When we remember that he was writing in the years immediately following the Boer War, of which he had been among the strongest opponents, its point and force can be appreciated. Nowhere is this clearer than in the splendid scene in which Wayne confronts the King and the Provosts who are planning the road which would mean an end to the independence of Notting Hill: the King says:

"‘You have come, my Lord, about Pump Street?’

‘About the city of Notting Hill,’ answered Wayne, proudly.  
‘Of which Pump Street is a living and rejoicing part.’

‘Not a very large part,’ said Barker, contemptuously.

‘That which is large enough for the rich to covet,’ said Wayne, drawing up his head, ‘is large enough for the poor to defend.’

The King slapped both his legs and waved his feet for a second in the air.

‘Every respectable person in Notting Hill,’ cut in Buck with his cold, coarse voice, ‘is for us and against you. I have plenty of friends in Notting Hill.’

‘Your friends are those who have taken your gold for other

men's hearthstones, my Lord Buck,' said Provost Wayne. 'I can well believe they are your friends.'

'They've never sold dirty toys, anyhow,' said Buck, laughing shortly.

'They've sold dirtier things,' said Wayne calmly; 'they have sold themselves.'"

For all his confusions, which were many and which finally destroyed him, Chesterton at this time saw two things clearly enough. The first was that the dull bureaucratic Utopia of the Fabians, and the bright mechanical Utopia of Wells which was but a special form of it, merely reflected and glorified the reality of the imperialism which he hated. He had had the most recent proof of this in the Fabian support of the Boer War, on the ground that the Boers were inefficient and out-of-date and ought to be absorbed into the modern and efficient Empire. The second was that all these people were wrong in supposing that the world was entering an age of drabness and compromise. He believed that on the contrary it was entering a revolutionary and therefore an heroic age. That the revolution which he expected was quite different from the revolution which took place, and that he failed to see in that revolution when it came the thing he had foreseen, is true enough, but less important than the essential rightness of his intuition. As Wayne put it before his last battle:

"When I was young I remember in the old dreary days, wiseacres used to write books about how trains would go faster, and all the world would be one empire, and tramcars go to the moon. And even as a child I used to say to myself, 'Far more likely that we shall go on the crusades again or worship the gods of the city.' And so it has been."

*The Napoleon of Notting Hill* was the first blast against the Fabian Utopia. E. M. Forster in *The Machine Stops* (written about 1912, but first published in book form in *The Eternal Moment*, 1928), and Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* (1932), attack from a different angle. The Utopia of Wells is capitalist society which has miraculously overcome its contradictions, because the socialism of Wells is utopian socialism developing undialectically not as a negation but as a mere continuation of bourgeois society. Marxists cannot accept such a future as possible, any more than could Chesterton, but if it was possible would still reject it as odious.



Wells regarded it as both possible and desirable. Forster and Huxley, accepting it as possible, rejected it as intolerable, though for quite different reasons.

The sterilised, cellophane world of Wells moved Huxley to loathing and contempt, but Forster to pity and terror. This is in part because Forster is more humane, more sensitive and more genuinely civilised, but also partly because it was more possible in 1932 than in 1912 to see the horror of such a world carried to its logical conclusions.

"It is good," wrote Lowes Dickinson of *The Machine Stops*, "that someone should take the Wells-Shaw prophecies and turn them inside out." This Forster certainly does. He describes a world state in the distant future in which man has gone deep underground, the entire surface of the earth having been abandoned. Each individual lives alone in an identical room, from which he can be in television contact with every other individual throughout the world. No work has to be done, since every need, synthetic food, synthetic clothing and synthetic culture is provided by 'the Machine' upon the pressure of the appropriate button. On the rare occasions on which they leave their rooms moving platforms and huge, swift airships are there to carry them. Their minds have become passive and receptive, their bodies torpid and feeble. The whole earth is a unity linked by 'the Machine', which has long passed beyond human control and is on the way to being worshipped as a super-human force:

"The Machine," they exclaimed, "feeds us and clothes us and houses us; through it we speak to one another, through it we see one another, in it we have our being. The Machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition: the Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine."

In much the same spirit, and without any apparent ironic intention, Wells makes one of the characters in *The World Set Free* boast that "Science is no longer our servant."

And just as the hero in *A Modern Utopia* notes with approval the absence of windows in the express train which carries him from Switzerland to London, the leading character in *The Machine Stops*, Vashti, in a flight across the world to visit her son Kuno, can find nothing to interest her on the surface of the earth:

"At midday she took a second glance at the earth. The air-ship was crossing another range of mountains, but she could

see little, owing to clouds. Masses of black rock hovered below her, and merged indistinctly into grey. Their shapes were fantastic; one of them resembled a prostrate man.

"‘No ideas here,’ murmured Vashti, and hid the Caucasus behind a metal blind.

"In the evening she looked again. They were crossing a golden sea, in which lay many small islands and one peninsula.

"She repeated ‘No ideas here,’ and hid Greece behind a metal blind."

In the end comes catastrophe, swift and complete, "as it was in days of Noë". The Machine stops, and with its stopping, food, light and air fail and the entombed millions die. In the darkness Vashti and Kuno meet, and before the end he tells her of his visit to the upper air and of his discovery there of a remnant upon the earth who will make a new beginning. In this moment the truth about their civilisation becomes clear to them:

- "They wept for humanity, those two, not for themselves. They could not bear that this should be the end. Ere silence was completed their hearts were opened, and they knew what had been important on the earth. Man, the flower of all flesh, the noblest of all creatures visible, man who had once made god in his image, and had mirrored his strength on the constellations, beautiful naked man was dying, strangled in the garments that he had woven. Century after century had he toiled, and here was his reward."

Here, it seems to me, Forster occupies a position midway between those of Morris and Huxley. All three reject 'modern civilisation' as Morris used sometimes to call it. But Morris, though at times he may have accepted the possibility of catastrophe, had also grasped the dialectics of change. He understood the two-sided nature of capitalism, that while it corrupts, it also creates the class which can transcend it. For Forster and Huxley the corruption alone is apparent, or at best is overwhelmingly preponderant. But Forster, unlike Huxley, never despairs of humanity. He believes in human fallibility, where Huxley believes in human wickedness, in original sin. So that while Forster believes man capable of a temporary loss of direction, Huxley does not believe him capable of finding his way at all—unless by divine Grace, and he is more than doubtful if Grace will be

given. Forster perhaps believes that man is now lost, that a period of retreat and disaster is inevitable, which may be the reason for his relative silence, but always he holds firm to the conviction that something will be saved and a new start made, and that in the end man will triumph.

For Forster "Man is the measure," but for Huxley human life is meaningless unless it can be evaluated in terms of something outside itself. In *Brave New World* he attacks the idea of humanism while appearing only to describe a society whose sole objects are stability and happiness in the lowest and most mechanical sense of that word. A society based upon humanism is, for him, necessarily evil. Happiness without Grace can be secured only at the price of subordinating the individual, of distorting him to fit a desired pattern. Huxley is unable to understand that a socialist society is a form of movement in which each individual is able to reach his highest potentialities in his relation to other individuals, and not a universal and glorified Butlin's Holiday Camp.

In *Brave New World* the distortion of the individual is total, and takes place before birth, or rather before decanting, since normal birth has long been abandoned. Out of his bottle Huxley produces at will Samurai or low-grade morons, incapable of thought and therefore of boredom. For all alike, from Alpha to Moron, there is a prescribed routine, at a suitable level, of work, games, promiscuity and Soma, a drug with "all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects".

Into this world comes a young man reared by accident upon Shakespeare and myths in an Indian Reservation in Mexico. He reacts violently against its machine-like order and demands as his birthright the right to be unhappy:

"'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.'

"'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'

"'All right, then,' said the Savage defiantly, 'I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.'

"'Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the

right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.'

There was a long silence.

"'I claim them all,' said the Savage at last."

All this is quite logical and unanswerable if you accept the mechanistic postulates which Huxley, for all his air of scornful superiority, shares with Wells. If you accept the idea that man is essentially unchanging, that social stability can only be preserved by conditioning everyone for one special job and making sure that he does it, that happiness consists in being mechanically fitted for this job as a ball fits a socket and being drugged with mechanical amusements during your leisure hours, that freedom is ignorance and a blind surrender to natural forces, then clearly there are no alternatives except the Brave New World and a hopeless barbarism. In this situation the choice of most of us would, I think, be that of the Savage. Huxley clearly intends us to regard this as his own preference, but it is difficult to be convinced of the sincerity of one who, with the world before him, has chosen to leave England to settle in Hollywood, the place which perhaps most exactly anticipates the life described in *Brave New World*.

Wells, too, seems to feel that some such choice now faces mankind. In *Mind at the End of Its Tether* he writes:

"Man must go steeply up or down, and the odds seem to be all in favour of his going down and out. If he comes up, then so great is the adaptation demanded of him that he must cease to be a man. Ordinary man is at the end of his tether."

And Huxley, in *Ape and Essence*, of which something must be said in the final section, has described with unpleasing relish the descent into barbarism which he thinks cannot be long delayed.

Yet in fact these postulates only need to be clearly stated to be exposed as self-evidently false, and in practice they are being shown daily to be false before our eyes, in that third of the world which is now building socialism upon quite different postulates. It is the fact of the building of socialism which gives us standards by which both Wells and his critics can be judged and which places our understanding of Utopia upon a quite new footing. As Nowhere becomes Somewhere the News we receive from it cannot but change.

### 3. *The Last Phase*

The plight of the latter-day Utopians is neatly stated in the passage from Nicholas Berdiaeff with which Huxley prefaces *Brave New World*:

"Utopias seem very much more realisable than we had formerly supposed. And now we find ourselves face to face with a question which is painful in quite a new way: How can we avoid their actual realisation?"

". . . Utopias are capable of realisation. Life moves towards Utopia. And perhaps a new age is beginning in which the intellectuals and the cultured class will dream of methods of avoiding Utopia and of returning to a society that is not Utopian, that is less 'perfect' and more free."

For Berdiaeff, for Huxley, for the class which they represent, to-morrow is not merely "as awful as to-day"; to-morrow is infinitely worse, to-morrow is unthinkable. And so, in this last phase, this era of the general crisis and impending overthrow of capitalism, Utopia changes its character.

For the greater part of the time covered by this book the bourgeoisie was a proud and advancing class, growing strong within the framework of feudalism, aiming at state power, winning state power, and, finally, exercising state power. They have looked forward with confidence, and Utopia was what their best representatives, those who, on the whole, were able to see beyond the narrower class interests and identify the advance of the bourgeoisie with the advance of humanity, saw it at the end of the road. It was a vision that was hopeful even if not always complacent—even if some of the Utopians could see that the pledges of the bourgeois revolution were not being honoured, they were confident that with a little good advice, a little push along the right road, all would be well.

Partial exceptions, like Blake, there certainly were, but on the whole it was not till the last decades of the nineteenth century that the general picture changed. Then at last the rise of a new class, menacing, indispensable, could not be ignored. It began to be clear that Utopia, if it was ever to be realised, was to be the outcome of a workers' revolution that was still to come, not the last chapter completing the bourgeois revolution. Hence the

alarm of Greg, of Donnelly, of Bramah. In the last two Sections we have traced the process further: we have seen the reaction against the crude optimism of Wells, and, perhaps even more significantly, we have seen how Wells in his old age retreated from his own early optimism.

And so, in a sense, we have come to the end of the history of the English Utopia: on the one hand the bourgeoisie who see in their own future the future of civilisation cannot now contemplate that future with anything but despair, on the other, the working class and their allies who are actually fighting to win or to build socialism are seldom inclined to construct imaginary pictures of a future that is shaping itself under their hands. Yet the utopian form has too strong a hold over men's minds to be so easily abandoned, and during the last decades it has been used for a variety of purposes, all very different from those of the classical utopias of the past.

To this, as to so many generalisations, there appears one exception, *An Unknown Land* by Lord Samuel, published in 1942, but 'planned and largely written before the war'. Here, indeed, we have, in the form of a sequel to Bacon's *New Atlantis*,<sup>1</sup> something that has quite the air of a utopia in the traditional style, so much so, that it suggests an academic exercise rather than a serious original work. And Samuel, like the Liberal Party of which he is the acknowledged theoretician and philosopher, is himself something of a survival in these days.

As might be expected in a sequel to *New Atlantis*, great emphasis is placed upon the advance of science and invention, and upon education. But the most immediately striking thing is that when the Liberal philosopher has to construct an ideal economy, the one which he is forced to adopt is based on the classic Marxist formula "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". Samuel's Utopia, like More's, is a classless, communist society, and it is at least to his credit that he abandons all the clumsy devices to which Bellamy, Hertzka or Wells were driven to construct a plausible Utopia on any other basis.

It would be too much to expect in addition that Bensalem should have reached the classless society by way of class struggle or revolution. On the contrary, class struggle had little place in Bensal history, and their views upon revolution were identical with those of an English Whig of the twentieth century:

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter III, Section 1.

"The essence of a revolution is violence; it may seek moral or humane ends, but, by using means that are immoral and cruel, it pushes those ends farther away. Nor is it ever true to say that 'things cannot be worse than they are'. They always can, and they often become so. Misery breeds revolution, and revolution breeds fresh miseries."

The Bensal social system, therefore.

"was not established suddenly, through some revolutionary upheaval, it grew up during centuries; but under the stimulus of suturization, the last hundred years has seen a more rapid advance than ever before."

Suturization, an operation by which the skulls and consequently the natural capacities of the children were enlarged, is presented, in fact, as the operative miracle producing social change. This is typical of the latest phase of utopianism. Unless the class struggle is recognised as the means of changing society, that change must always come from something outside—from a Prince, as in the earlier Utopias, from abstract reason or some unexplained change of heart, or from some creative miracle, and, since the decay of religious faith has made it difficult for us to accept miracles in the sense of a supernatural intervention in human affairs, the modern utopian writers turn to science in the hope that it will provide. This tendency we have seen clearly in Wells, and it can be found in another form in Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, which turns on the possibility of men willing to live for three hundred years.

Whatever form it takes, it is in practice an affirmation that society cannot be changed without some physical, biological change in man, and this is brought out by Samuel in another way. Just as Wells in *Men Like Gods* represented the working class by two chauffeurs who reject the Utopian way of life even more emphatically than their 'betters', so here, the crew of the ship on which Samuel's hero reaches Utopia are drawn as complete political illiterates, accepting without question the crudest bourgeois economic and social ideas and rejecting with an instant and unanimous horror the classless utopian society of Bensalem. It is clear that Samuel, like Wells, never for a moment regards the workers as a positive political force.

As if all this were not enough to make it clear that his 'communism' has nothing in common with that of Marx or Lenin, Samuel adds a little farce in the form of a visit to a group of

small islands lying off the Bensal coast whose way of life reflects that of the main European countries as he sees them. Upon one of these islands, Ulmia:

"A theorist arose, with a creed that purported to be simple, logical and based on a comprehensive survey of the facts of history; but which was in fact complicated, muddle-headed and partial to the last degree. Justifying themselves by this theory, a few violent men carried out the revolution, and East Island became 'The Union of Logical Materialist Idealists'.

"So far as I could understand it, the theory seemed to be based on a strange doctrine that human societies are simply the products of economic factors, and that the whole history of mankind is nothing more than variations on a single theme—the production and consumption of things. Holding these ideas the people had taken materialism as their creed and Tools as their emblem; their national badge was a Pitchfork crossed by a Saw, with the motto 'Things Rule Men'.

"The theory, Lamon said to me, insisted upon a state of society that was classless and equalitarian. 'Our own system in Bensalem', he said, 'is also of that order. But while that has been built up over a period of centuries, on the principle of raising the whole population to the standard reached by the highest, the equality here was brought about by the much simpler, and much quicker, method of bringing everyone down to the standard of the lowest.'"

Satire has always been recognised as a legitimate weapon of the utopian writer, and Marxism and the U.S.S.R. are as legitimate targets for satire as any others, but it is hardly satire to attach to anything a string of qualities and beliefs which it does not possess. And, while misrepresentation of Marxism is fairly common, it is a little surprising to find a writer of Samuel's eminence so ignorant of its most elementary principles, or so little concerned to state them fairly, as these paragraphs show him to be. The book as a whole, giving with one hand and taking away with the other, and coming to the conclusion that what is needed in Britain is, broadly speaking, a slightly more rapid advance along the road now being followed, has an air of weariness and banality, fully reflecting the dead end which Liberal thought has now reached.

Such as it is, however, it is the only utopia of recent years with any pretensions to a positive character. Some other works may be



passed over with the barest mention. There are, first, the large class of quite ephemeral books which make use of the utopian form as the scaffolding for a work of fiction whose main purpose is to entertain: their only importance is as evidence of the continued popularity of this form. Typical of such books, at different levels, are *Orphan Island* (1924) by Rose Macaulay, *Lost Horizon* (1933) by James Hilton, and *They found Atlantis* (1936) by Dennis Wheatley. Of these the most respectable is *Orphan Island* a lively fantasy of a community growing from the shipwreck on a Pacific island in 1855 of a number of orphan children under the charge of a pious and strong-minded maiden lady. Its rediscovery after seventy years gives scope for entertaining if superficial satire upon aspects both of Victorian and contemporary English life, and the appeal of the Utopian and the desert island fantasies are cunningly exploited in combination.

Another group, which, while having a certain utopian character, is hardly within the scope of this book, is the 'scientific' fantasy of the future. Here there is an immense field, rising from the American pulp fiction which leaves Wells far behind in its furious exploration of inter-stellar space, to such serious works as Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* (1921), J. B. S. Haldane's *The Last Judgment* (1927) and Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930).

The growth of fascism in the 1920s and the creation of a broad anti-fascist unity had also its utopian reflection. Two avowedly anti-fascist negative utopias, written as a warning of what the world might become if fascism triumphed, are Joseph O'Neill's *Land Under England* (1935) and Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night* (1937).

In *Swastika Night* the whole world is divided between a German and a Japanese Empire, equal in power and identical in policy and methods. In the German Empire, with which the book deals, all the existing tendencies of fascism are developed to their logical conclusion. Around the worship of Hitler a complete hierarchical society has been elaborated:

"As a woman is above a worm,  
So is a man above a woman.  
As a man is above a woman,  
So is a Nazi above any foreign Hitlerian.  
As a Nazi is above a foreign Hitlerian,  
So is a Knight above a Nazi.

As a Knight is above a Nazi,  
So is Der Feuhrer (whom may Hitler Bless)  
Above all Knights."

Women are entirely degraded, and men, even if German Nazis, are illiterate scrfs, violence and brutality characterise all relationships, race superiority has become an absolute principle.

Most interesting, perhaps, is a point afterwards elaborated by George Orwell, the complete obliteration of the past—all history, all literature, all ancient monuments have been swept away, so that nothing can remain to remind men of a civilised past before the coming of fascism, and so, perhaps, form centres of resistance. Around this is developed the book's simple plot, of an old Knight in whose family there exists a tradition of secret nonconformity, and who has preserved the sole remaining record of the ancient days. This he hands on to an Englishman, and, we are to infer, from this knowledge may grow an opposition which will ultimately destroy fascism. Despite this hope, the general effect is negative and depressing—we are shown fascism as something to be feared, we are not shown how it may be fought.

The same is true of *Land Under England*, a book on a much higher technical level. Here we have, not a direct description of fascism, but a kind of allegory. The hero, exploring the Roman Wall, discovers a way down into a dark underworld, where, among monsters and fungi, survive descendants of Romans who escaped there at the time of the Anglo-Saxon conquest. Faced with madness and disintegration by the horror of perpetual night, these people had evolved a society in which individual consciousness, and even speech, had disappeared, in which the Roman qualities of discipline and obedience had been carried to a degree in which no one had any life except as a function of the state. Every action, every thought, that was not needed by the state had not merely disappeared but had become psychologically impossible.

The analogy with contemporary fascism is only hinted at in the text, but it is emphasised in a Foreword contributed by A.E., who writes:

"The highest form satire can take is to assume the apotheosis of the policy satirised and make our shuddering humanity recoil from the spectacle of the complete realisation of its own ideals. And this is what Joseph O'Neill has done in imagining

a State where the unity of obliterated individualism is complete, where the Master, or Hitler, of his Utopia, has a selfless humanity completely malleable to his will; and we recoil from the vision of that perfection of mechanised humanity, as if we had peered into one of the lowest of human hells."

In nearly all these books the main note is that of retreat—retreat into fantasy, into an unscientific exploitation of 'science', into gloom for the sake of gloom. In nearly all of them there is the abandonment of the belief that a just and decent society is possible and can grow out of existing society. More recently this retreat has become a rout and in such books as Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) we have the frankest reaction, a determination to resist the "actual realisation" of Utopia, a deep conviction that we must cling to all existing institutions, however corrupt, since any change can only be for the worse.

It is perhaps unfair to couple with such degraded books Herbert Read's *The Green Child* (1935), yet in this brilliant, innocent romance the retreat from the complex reality of the contemporary world is already strongly marked. Read describes two Utopian, simplified, finite and abstracted worlds—one a tiny South American Republic in the early part of the nineteenth century, the other under the ground. Into this latter world he tries to convey some of the knowledge of the upper earth, but he finds that this is impossible:

"His evidence was of no more value than that of a man who has woken from a vivid dream. His dream was real but it was unique."

In fact, it is the uniqueness of Read's dream, its total lack of relation to any of our experience which robs it of reality. The world he describes resembles in some ways the last part of *Back to Methuselah*: after a period of youthful play and sexual freedom its people graduate by stages to work of a simple kind, to intellectual pleasures, and finally to solitary contemplation ending in death, after which their bodies are preserved for ever in a crystallised state. It is the simplicity of the crystal towards which everything in this world strives, and it is in the collection, the arrangement and the contemplation of crystals, and the ringing of changes upon sets of crystal gongs, that their pleasures and their

philosophy alike revolve. Shaw, in *Back to Methuselah*, diagnosed in advance the state of mind which *The Green Child* reveals:

"Tyndall declared that he saw in Matter the promise and potency of all forms of life, and with his Irish graphic lucidity made a picture of a world of magnetic atoms, each atom with a positive and a negative pole, arranging itself by attraction and repulsion in orderly crystalline structure. Such a picture is dangerously fascinating to thinkers oppressed by the bloody disorders of the living world. Craving for purer subjects of thought, they find in the conception of crystals and magnets a happiness more dramatic and less childish than the happiness found by mathematicians in abstract numbers, because they see in the crystals beauty and movement without the corrupting appetites of fleshly vitality."

Read, like his hero, longs for order and beauty. He hopes to find these, first, in the pastoral simplicity of his South American Utopia, but fails, and, following the significant image of the stream flowing backward to its source, discovers them finally in an unhuman race to whom death is the highest form of being. It is the same vision as that which he expressed much earlier in one of his poems:

"New children must be born of gods in  
a deathless land, where the  
uneroded rocks bound clear  
from cool  
glassy tarns, and where no flaw is in mind or flesh.  
"Sense and image they must refashion—  
they will not recreate  
love: love ends in hate; they will  
not use  
words: words lie."

It is a vision that holds little hope for the future, but it is not an ignoble vision like those of Huxley and Orwell. *Ape and Essence* is not so much a recantation as a complement of *Brave New World*. In that book the capitalist world had carried itself to a triumphant climax of servile prosperity: today Huxley prefers to back the other horse and describe it destroying itself in a third World War, fought to a finish with every sort of atomic and bacteriological weapon. It is in the post-war ruin that his scene is

set. Here, in Los Angeles, a handful of savages, degraded, disease-ridden, "as rude as barbarism, but lacking both the hope and the pleasure of barbarism", exist parasitically upon the corpse of civilisation, using books for fuel and plundering graves for clothes. A ship from New Zealand, which, by its geographical position had alone escaped destruction, appears off the coast, and a New Zealand biologist falls into the hands of the barbarians.

He finds that Belial is now god, since evil has finally triumphed, and this remnant of humanity pays him propitiatory rites in a hopeless attempt to stave off annihilation. The Arch-Vicar of Belial explains to his visitor how it all happened:

"It began with machines and the first grain ships from the New World. Food for the hungry and a burden lifted from men's shoulders. . . .

"But Belial knew that feeding means breeding. In the old days when people made love they merely increased the infantile mortality rate and lowered the expectation of life. . . .

"Yes, Belial foresaw it all—the passage from hunger to imported food, from imported food to booming population and from booming population back to hunger again. Back to hunger. The New Hunger, the Higher Hunger . . . the hunger that is the cause of total wars and the total wars that are the cause of yet more hunger. . . .

"Progress and Nationalism—those were the two great ideas He put into their heads. Progress—the theory that you can get something for nothing; the theory that you can gain in one field without paying for your gain in another. . . . Nationalism—the theory that the state you happen to be subject to is the only true god."

Two things stand out: Huxley's firm persuasion of the folly and wickedness of mankind, and his malthusianism (to use a new word coined by James Fyfe in *The Modern Quarterly*).<sup>1</sup> This is no new belief with him: twenty years earlier in *Antic Hay* he had declaimed about:

<sup>1</sup> "The Malthusian ideas do not die. On the contrary they go from bad to worse. Their latest exponent, Vogt, in his book *The Road to Survival* expounds the notion that not only is the rate of increase of food supplies limited, but there is a limit beyond which they cannot increase at all. Vogt's enthusiasm for war, pestilence and famine as factors limiting the growth of human populations deserves a special name for which I propose the word *malthusianism*" (*The Modern Quarterly*, Vol. VI, No. 3, p. 201).

"The way they breed. Like maggots, sir, like maggots. Millions of them creeping about the face of the country, spreading blight and dirt wherever they go, ruining everything. It's the people I object to. . . .

"With populations that in Europe alone expand by millions every year, no political foresight is possible. A few years of this mere bestial propagation will suffice to make nonsense of the wisest schemes of today—or would suffice if any wise schemes were being matured at present."

It is this combination of malthusiasm and hatred which is most characteristic and makes *Ape and Essence* so like a fictionised version of Vogt's *The Road to Survival*. Huxley sees disaster ahead not because of the false policies of capitalism, not because of any mistakes which might be corrected, but because men are maggots and deserve disaster if only as punishment for their presumption, because, "these wretched slaves of wheels and ledgers began to congratulate themselves on being the Conquerors of Nature."

The very idea of progress, of a world better than that we now know, being absurd, the practical conclusion is obvious—that we must avoid all attempts at change, must accept every existing injustice and misery lest in trying to put them right we upset the 'equilibrium of Nature', must allow Malthus' natural checks once more to operate and so, perhaps, escape the worst of the disasters which Huxley describes with something unpleasantly like relish. It is significant that he never indulges in a general diatribe without adding a specific sneer directed against Communism and the Soviet Union, and not less significant that *Ape and Essence* has been so widely praised in the United States.

It might be thought that this book represented the lowest depths to which the new *genre* of anti-utopias could fall, but the publication a year later of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* robbed it of even that distinction. Here we are introduced to a world divided among three 'communist' states which exist in a condition of permanent war, permanent scarcity, permanent purges and permanent slavery. The 'hero' of the book is employed in the Ministry of Truth, whose task it is not only to deceive the people about what is actually happening, but continually to recreate the past so that it is impossible to discover the truth about anything that has ever happened. For these purposes a new language 'Double Talk' is being evolved, in which 'Thought Crime', that is to say any idea

not in line with the policy of the state at any given moment, will become impossible. This goal has not yet been reached, and the hero does fall into 'Thought Crime' as well as into 'Sex Crime', that is to say into love or a rather shoddy substitute for it. It is worth noting that in Orwell's world compulsory chastity plays the same role as compulsory promiscuity in *Brave New World*—the object in each case being to prevent normal sexual feeling, and so to degrade sex that it cannot afford any basis for individuality.

As a consequence of their crimes the hero and his mistress fall into the hands of the Ministry of Love, where he undergoes months of torture, lovingly described by Orwell in great detail, and is finally released an empty shell, completely broken and stripped of any trace of humanity. The whole account, like *Ape and Essence*, is tricked out with a pretence of philosophic discussion, but as an intellectual attack on Marxism it is beneath contempt. What Orwell does do with great skill is to play upon the lowest fears and prejudices engendered by bourgeois society in dissolution. His object is not to argue a case but to induce an irrational conviction in the minds of his readers that any attempt to realise socialism must lead to a world of corruption, torture and insecurity. To accomplish this no slander is too gross, no device too filthy: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, for this country at least, the last word to date in counter-revolutionary apologetics.

This would be a sordid ending to a splendid story if it were indeed the end. But of course it is not. The very degeneracy of such books as *Ape and Essence* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is in itself a symptom of the approach to a new stage. Such books are an acknowledgement by the defenders of bourgeois society that they have now nothing left to defend, of the inability of that society to provide any prospect of life for the people, let alone any hope of advance. In this sense they should be called anti-utopias rather than utopias, since the essence of the classical utopias of the past was a belief that by satire, by criticism or by holding up an example to be followed, they could help to change the world. In this they have had a positive part to play, they have stimulated thought, led men to criticise and fight against abuses, taught them that poverty and oppression were not a part of a natural order of things which must be endured.

Nor is this all. We can see today in the building of socialism a transformation of man and of nature on a scale never before attempted. The fantasies of Cokaygne, the projects of Bacon, the

anticipations of Ernest Jones are in effect being translated into facts in the Stalin Plans which are now changing the face and the climate of the U.S.S.R. Writing of only one aspect of these plans, Professor Bernal said recently:

“This irrigation and afforestation is an over-all plan covering the whole of the dry areas of the Soviet Union, ranging from absolute desert to very dry sandy steppe, and steppe liable to drought. The total area involved is something like two million square miles, twice the size of Western Europe, or two-thirds the area of the United States. This whole area is being transformed by three simultaneous and complementary operations—an afforestation scheme, a hydro-electric and navigation canal scheme and an irrigation and soil-conservation scheme. Though separately administered these form part of one coherent plan.”

This realisation of Utopia through the power of the working class, which the Huxleys and Orwells find so terrifying, is the vindication of the belief that has lain at the roots of all the great utopian writings of the past, the belief in the capacity and the splendid future of mankind.

To-day the long and honoured stream of utopian writers has entered and made a noble contribution to the great river of the movement for socialism. Today millions are convinced that Utopia, not in the sense of a perfect and therefore unchanging society, but of a society alive and moving toward ever new victories, is to be had if men are ready to fight for it. Human knowledge, human activity, science in the service of the people not of the monopolists and war-makers, are leading to a world which, while it will not correspond to the desires of More, of Bacon, of Morris, or of the unknown poets who dreamed of the Land of Cokayne, will have been enriched by all of them and by the many others who have made their contribution to that undefinable but ever living and growing reality which I have called the English Utopia.



TAILPIECE

COKAYGNE FANTASY

The land  
Of sun and sucking pigs  
And lust made light  
Is poor man's heaven.  
Ah there the sweet, white water  
Turns wine on tongue  
Wind's tongue is tied  
And man's  
Tunes only to delight.  
Light lie on glebe  
Men's bones, and stones  
Bear the back's burden softly  
And a rounded-image.

Man grows with time  
In grace and gentleness,  
Takes nature's mould  
And nature his.  
Subject and object fused  
Race madly up to unimagined glory.  
Cut cakes remain,  
And the roast goose delights with gesture's garnish.

So the old poet,  
Mocked by philosophy six hundred years,  
And by Jehovah's curse on bread and brow.  
And all the while  
Plough turned and racketing loom  
And toil grew tall  
And all man's fate was darkness.

To the sound of the sirens in the morning  
Man goeth forth to his labours,  
While the fountains of honey gush heavily,  
Forgotten in Cokaygne's green dream.

In the idle delight that had grown  
To seem foolishness in the earth's sight.  
Till he awoke to Hammersmith and a fine morning  
And a world washed white,  
And the long night rolled over  
And Cokaygne's delight not idleness  
But toil new taught, turned and made light.



## APPENDIX

### THE LAND OF COKAYGNE

[I give below the complete text of *The Land of Cokaygne* in a modernised verse form. The only merit that I can claim for it as verse is that of as close fidelity to the original as is compatible with preserving its structure and rhyme scheme. Rather more than half of the original text is to be found in *The Cambridge Book of Prose and Verse*: for a complete version the reader has to go to such places as Maetznér's *Altenglische Sprachproben* or to Hickes' *Thesaurus*. So far as I know no version in modern English has ever been printed. I believe that many readers will find such a version convenient, because, while the original text does not present any insurmountable difficulties, its language has a strangeness which might stand between the reader and a proper understanding of the poem.]

- Out to sea, far west of Spain,  
Lies the land men call Cokaygne.  
No land that under heaven is,  
For wealth and goodness comes near this;  
Though Paradise is merry and bright  
Cokaygne is a fairer sight.  
For what is there in Paradise  
But grass and flowers and greeneries?  
Though there is joy and great delight,  
There's nothing good but fruit to bite,  
There's neither hall, bower, nor bench,  
And only water thirst to quench.  
And of men there are but two,  
Elijah and Enoch also;  
Sadly thither would I come  
Where but two men have their home.

In Cokaygne we drink and eat  
Freely without care and sweat,  
The food is choice and clear the wine,  
At fourses and at supper time,  
I say again, and I dare swear,  
No land is like it anywhere,

Under heaven no land like this  
Of such joy and endless bliss.

There is many a sweet sight,  
All is day, there is no night,  
There no quarreling nor strife,  
There no death, but endless life;  
There no lack of food or cloth,  
There no man or woman wroth.  
There no serpent, wolf or fox,  
Horse or nag or cow or ox,  
Neither sheep nor swine nor goat,  
Nor creeping groom, I'd have you note,  
Neither stallion there nor stud.  
Other things you'll find are good.  
In bed or garment or in house,  
There's neither flea nor fly nor louse.  
Neither thunder, sleet nor hail,  
No vile worm nor any snail,  
Never a storm, nor rain nor wind,  
There's no man or woman blind.  
All is sporting, joy and glee,  
Lucky the man that there may be.

There are rivers broad and fine  
Of oil, milk, honey and of wine;  
Water serveth there no thing  
But for sight and for washing.  
Many fruits grow in that place  
For all delight and sweet solace.

There is a mighty fine Abbey,  
Thronged with monks both white and grey,  
Ah, those chambers and those halls!  
All of pasties stand the walls,  
Of fish and flesh and all rich meat,  
The tastiest that men can eat.  
Wheaten cakes the shingles all,  
Of church, of cloister, bower and hall.  
The pinnacles are fat puddings,  
Good food for princes or for kings.

Every man takes what he will,  
As of right, to eat his fill.  
All is common to young and old,  
To stout and strong, to meek and bold.

There is a cloister, fair and light,  
Broad and long, a goodly sight.  
The pillars of that place are all  
Fashioned out of clear crystal,  
And every base and capital  
Of jasper green and red coral.  
In the garth there stands a tree  
Pleasant truly for to see.  
Ginger and cyperus the roots,  
And valerian all the shoots,  
Choicest nutmegs flower thereon,  
The bark it is of cinnamon.  
The fruit is scented gillyflower,  
Of every spice is ample store.  
There the roses, red of hue,  
And the lovely lily, too,  
Never fade through day and night,  
But endure to please men's sight.  
In that Abbey are four springs,  
Healing and health their water brings,  
Balm they are, and wine indeed,  
Running freely for men's need,  
And the bank about those streams  
With gold and with rich jewels gleams.  
There is sapphire and uniune,  
Garnet red and astiune,  
Emerald, ligure and prassiune,  
Beryl, onyx, topasiune,  
Amethyst and chrystolite,  
Chalcedony and epetite<sup>1</sup>

There are birds in every bush,  
Throstle, nightingale and thrush,

<sup>1</sup> It proved impossible to give all these stones their modern names without wrecking the rhyme scheme. *Uniune* is pearl, *Astiune*, sapphire, *Prassiune*, chrystolite, *Topasiune*, topaz and *Epetite*, bloodstone.

Woodpecker and the soaring lark,  
More there are than man may mark,  
Singing with all their merry might,  
Never ceasing day or night.  
Yet this wonder add to it—  
That geese fly roasted on the spit,  
As God's my witness, to that spot,  
Crying out, 'Geese, all hot, all hot!'  
Every goose in garlic drest,  
Of all food the seemliest.  
And the larks that are so couth  
Fly right down into man's mouth,  
Smothered in stew, and thereupon  
Piles of powdered cinnamon.  
Every man may drink his fill  
And needn't sweat to pay the bill.

When the monks go in to mass,  
All the windows that were glass,  
Turn them into crystal bright  
To give the monks a clearer light;  
And when the mass has all been said,  
And the mass-books up are laid,  
The crystal pane turns back to glass,  
The very way it always was.

Now the young monks every day  
After dinner go to play,  
No hawk not any bird can fly  
Half so fast across the sky  
As the monk in joyous mood  
In his wide sleeves and his hood.  
The Abbot counts it goodly sport  
To see his monks in haste depart,  
But presently he comes along  
To summon them to evensong.  
The monks refrain not from their play,  
But fast and far they flee away,  
And when the Abbot plain can see  
How all his monks inconstant flee,  
A wench upon the road he'll find,  
And turning up her white behind,

He beats upon it as a drum  
To call his monks to vespers home.  
When the monks behold that sport  
Unto the maiden all resort,  
And going all the wench about,  
Every one stroketh her white toute.  
So they end their busy day  
With drinking half the night away,  
And so to the long tables spread  
In sumptuous procession tread.

Another Abbey is near by,  
In sooth, a splendid nunnery,  
Upon a river of sweet milk,  
Where is plenteous store of silk.  
When the summer day is hot  
The younger nuns take out a boat,  
And forth upon the river clear,  
Some do row and some do steer.  
When they are far from their Abbey,  
They strip them naked for their play,  
And, plunging in the river's brim,  
Slyly address themselves to swim.  
When the young monks see that sport,  
Straightway thither they resort,  
And coming to the nuns anon,  
Each monk taketh to him one,  
And, swiftly bearing forth his prey,  
Carries her to the Abbey grey,  
And teaches her an orison,  
Jigging up and jigging down.  
The monk that is a stallion good,  
And can manage well his hood,  
He shall have, without a doubt,  
Twelve wives before the year is out,  
All of right and nought through grace,  
So he may himself solace.  
And the monk that sleepeth best,  
And gives his body ample rest,  
He, God knows, may presently  
Hope an Abbot for to be.



Whoso will come that land unto  
Full great penance he must do,  
He must wade for seven years  
In the dirt a swine-pen bears,  
Seven years right to the chin,  
Ere he may hope that land to win.  
Listen Lords, both good and kind,  
Never will you that country find  
Till through the ordeal you've gone  
And that penance has been done.  
So you may that land attain  
And never more return again,  
Pray to God that so it be,  
Amen, by holy charity.

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